

Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY

NOV.
16

ISSUED WEEKLY

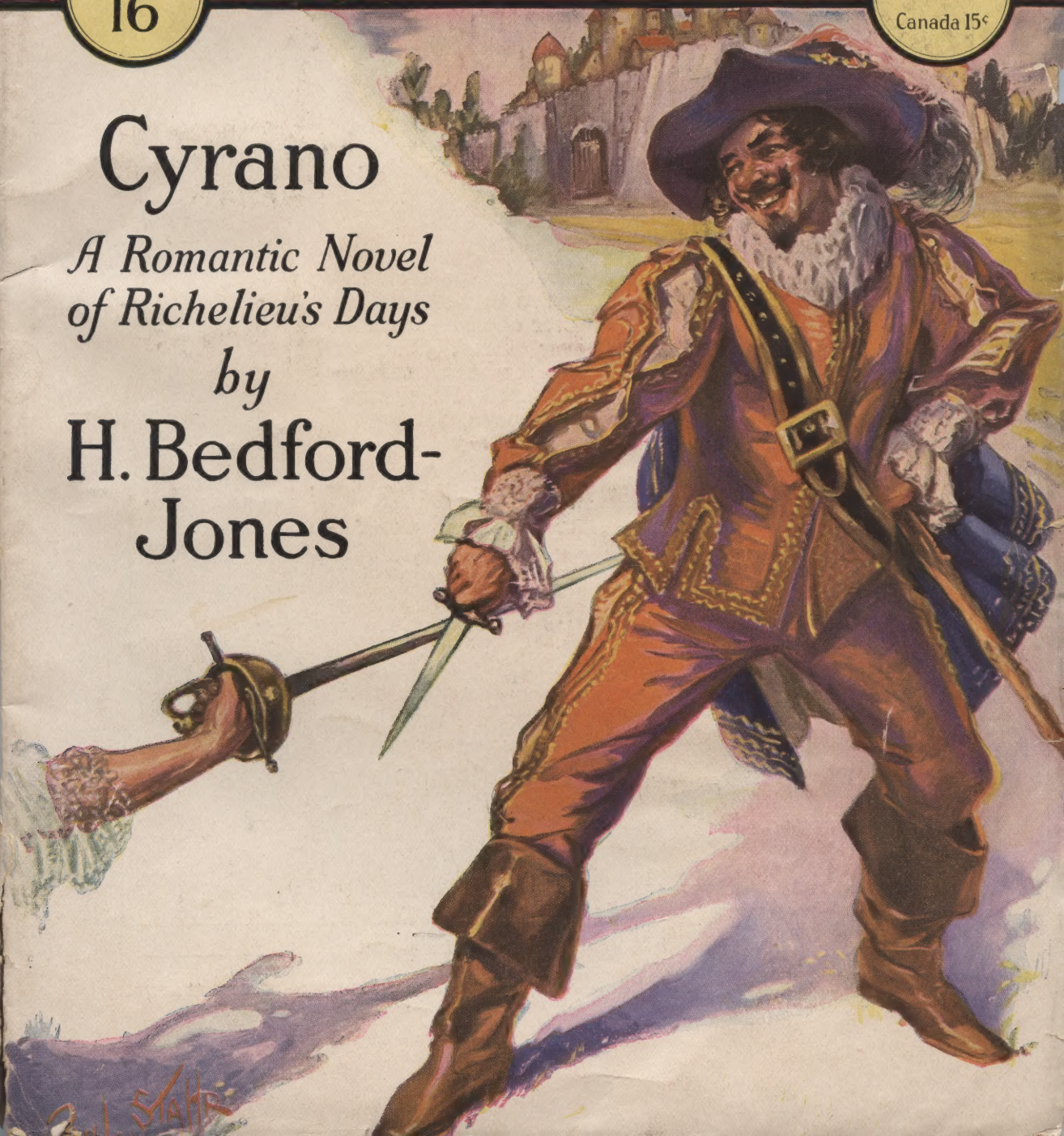
10¢
Canada 15¢

Cyrano

*A Romantic Novel
of Richelieu's Days*

by

H. Bedford-
Jones



BRAND NEW



GENUINE Model 3 CORONA

**LOWEST PRICE
EASIEST TERMS
EVER OFFERED**

CORONA

L. C. Smith & Corona Typewriter Co.

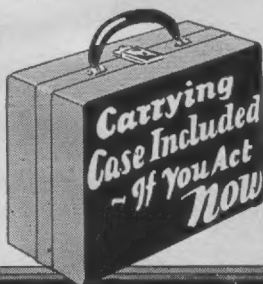


HERE'S your chance to own that *brand new* Genuine Model 3 Corona you've wanted—on the easiest terms ever offered—at **LOWEST PRICE** ever offered. Complete in every detail; back spacer, etc., *Manufacturer's Guarantee*. Recognized the world over as the finest, strongest, sturdiest portable built.

Yours for 10 DAYS FREE

**Send
No
Money**

Leatheroid carrying case, oiler, instructions free on this offer. Send no money—just the coupon. Without delay or red tape we will send you the Corona. Try it 10 days. If you decide to keep it, send us only \$2—then \$3 a month until our special price of \$39.90 is paid. Now is the time to buy. Special Xmas Package if you act now!



Only a limited number of these splendid machines available. To get one, you must act now! Experience the joy this personal writing portable typewriter can give you! Use it ten days free! See how easy it is to run and the splendidly typed letters it turns out. Ideal for the office desk, home, traveling. Small, compact, light, convenient. Don't send out letters, manuscripts, reports, bills in poor handwriting when you can have this Corona at such a low price on such easy terms. Remember, these are *brand new* machines right out of the Corona factory.

Save Money Use this Coupon

Smith Typewriter Sales Corp., (Corona Division)
469 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill. Dept. B-31

Ship me the Corona, F. O. B. Chicago. On arrival I'll deposit \$2 with express agent. If I keep the machine, I'll send you \$3 a month until the \$37.90 balance of \$39.90 price is paid; the title to remain with you until then. I am to have 10 days to try the typewriter. If I decide not to keep it, I will repack and return to express agent, who will return my \$2. You are to give your standard guarantee.

Name _____

Address _____

Employed by _____

1 inch to your biceps 2 inches to your chest *in* **7½** *hours*

A marvelous system of muscular education that transforms weaklings into strong men almost overnight. . . .

This is *not* a fish story. It's a fact! When I say I can add one whole inch of real live muscle to each of your arms and two whole inches of the same wonderful strength across your chest, in just 7½ hours; I mean just that.

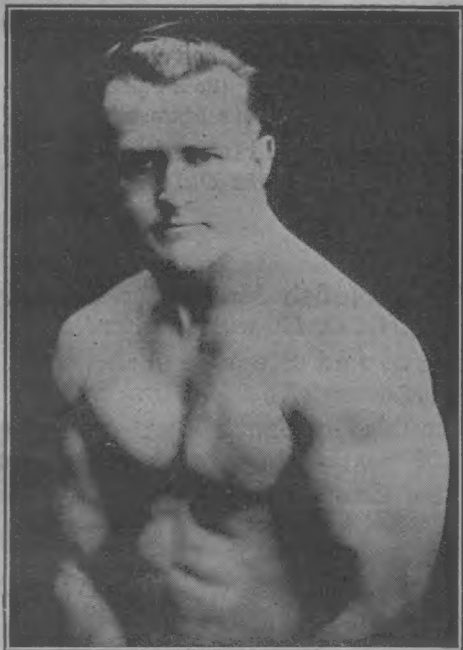
But I don't stop there. I do things with your body that even you never dreamed of. My business is to build muscle, and the health and strength that always come with muscle. In the past 19 years I've taken over 200,000 puny little underdeveloped bodies—coaxed them along—worked on them—filled them with new life—new hope—new terrifying strength that forced their owners to be powerful, fighting, proud men. And how simple it all is under my instruction!

Here's How I Do It!

All I ask of you is 7½ hours of your spare time, divided into 15 minute periods for 30 consecutive days. In those 15 minute periods you are to do exactly as I advise, using the apparatus I send you. At the end of the 7½ hours step before your mirror, and marvel at the transformation.

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Yours it can be—and quickly, too. But first send for my new 64-page book. Let me show you how such a body can be yours without risking a single penny. How my ironclad guarantee absolutely protects every single pupil. Send for it today. Get going to new health—new happiness—new joys now!



EARLE LIEDERMAN—The Muscle Builder

Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Health," "Endurance," etc.

**Send For My New
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"Muscular Development"

IT IS FREE

Do you get that? It's free. I don't ask a cent. It's yours with my compliments. Take it and read it. It's the peppiest piece of literature you ever flashed your eyes on. And 48 full-page photos of myself and some of my numerous prize-winning pupils. This is the finest collection of strong men ever assembled into one book—look them over—doctors, lawyers, merchants, mechanics and every line of trade you can think of. I swear you'll never let this book get out of your hands again. And just think—you're getting it for nothing. Don't hesitate—no strings attached to it. Grab it.

Take your pen or pencil and fill out the coupon, or even your name and address on a postal will do—do it now before you turn this page.

Earle Liederman

Dept. 1111 305 Broadway, New York City

EARLE LIEDERMAN

Dept. 1111, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—Please send me absolutely free and without any obligation on my part whatsoever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." (Please write or print plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

ARGOSY



ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME 208

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and

LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE.,
16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C. 2

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer

C. T. DIXON, Vice-President

PUBLISHED WEEKLY AND COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

Single copies, 10 cents; by the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered.

Entered as second-class matter November 28, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

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Be A RADIO Expert



Seldom Under \$100 a Week

"My earnings in Radio are many times greater than I ever anticipated they would be when I enrolled. They seldom fall under \$100 a week. My profits for the past three months were \$577, \$645, \$465. If your course cost 4 or 5 times more I would still consider it a good investment. You give a man more for his money than anybody else."

E. E. WINBORNE,

1414 W. 48th St., Norfolk, Va.



Making \$400 a Month

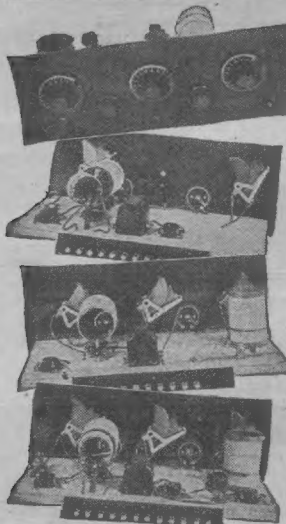
"I really believe that every man should take your course in Radio. If he has anything in him at all there is every chance for him to get some place. The field hasn't been scratched and it is getting bigger and better every day. A man just can't go wrong. I was making good money but could see the opportunities in Radio. Believe me, I am not sorry, as I have made more money than ever before. I have made more than \$400 each month."

J. G. DAHLSTEAD,

1484 So. 15th St., Salt Lake City, Utah.

Many make \$50 to \$200 a week

I GIVE YOU THE RADIO PARTS FOR A HOME EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY



WITH THEM YOU CAN BUILD 100 CIRCUITS. 4 YOU BUILD ARE SHOWN HERE MY BOOK EXPLAINS THIS PRACTICAL, FASCINATING WAY OF LEARNING RADIO AT HOME

This is Radio's Biggest Year

Don't slave your life away for \$25, \$35 and \$40 a week in a no-future job. You're foolish to be satisfied with less than \$50, \$60 or \$75 a week for more than the short time it takes to get ready for Radio. That is what the good Radio jobs pay. And \$50 to \$75 a week is only the beginning. Many lead to as high as \$200 to \$250 a week.

Big Growth Making Hundreds of Fine Jobs Yearly

Over 300,000 jobs have already been made by Radio's amazing growth. It continues to grow and expand fast. This big growth can put you ahead fast. I have doubled and tripled salaries. I have shown hundreds how to make much more money in Radio than they were making in other fields. Let me show you what I can do for you.

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The day you start I will show you how to do 10 Radio jobs most common in every neighborhood so you can begin making extra money. Frank Golden, 325 Walnut St., Newark, N. J., says, "I made over \$900 in my spare time in about 10 months." This is the world-famous course that pays for itself.

I Will Train You at Home in Your Spare Time

Hold your job. My 50-50 method of training—one-half from lesson books and one-half from practical experiments using Six Big Outfits of Parts given without extra charge, makes learning at home easy, fascinating. It is unequalled. It gives you practical Radio

experience while learning. You don't have to be a high school or college graduate. Many of my most successful graduates didn't finish the grades.

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My training is right up-to-the-minute with Radio's latest developments. Television, Talking Movies, Radio in Aviation, Screen Grid Tubes, A.C. Sets are included. It fits you for Radio factories, broadcasting stations, a spare-time or full-time business of your own, operating on board ship which gives you world-wide travel without expense, commercial land stations, research laboratories and many more branches. Every penny will be returned if after completion you are not satisfied with the lessons and instruction service.

FREE Book Tells What Radio Offers You

"Rich Rewards in Radio" gives you the facts about Radio, what your prospects are for the future, how you can get in without delay, what you can make. It explains our lifetime Employment Service after graduation and many other fine features. Get a copy AT ONCE.

J. E. SMITH, Pres.,
Dept. 9YK
National Radio Institute
Washington, D.C.



J. E. SMITH

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"It is certainly great sport to do Radio work and a profitable one too. I had the pleasure of earning \$110 last week servicing and selling sets. I have made as high as \$241 in two weeks. Before I entered Radio I was making \$35 a week. You started me off on the right foot by giving me the knowledge every man should have to succeed in Radio."

J. A. VAUGHN,
4202 Arsenal St., St. Louis, Mo.

Mail this Coupon at Once

J. E. Smith, President,
National Radio Institute,
Dept. 9YK
Washington, D. C.

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Name _____ Age _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____





Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

All-Story (Combined with Munsey)	Combination Line Rate \$3.00 Less 25 cash discount
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Detective Fiction W'kly	
Minimum space 4 lines.	

Dec. 21st Classified Forms Close Nov. 23rd.

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AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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INVENTORS—Write For Our Guide Book, "How To Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

EDUCATIONAL

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**RICHARD BLACKSTONE
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send free sample of your razor. (Fill in your
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-and it Brought Him 1129 Cool Shaves from One Single Blade!

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Dept. S-424, 1418 Pendleton
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Only 4 Motions used in playing this fascinating instrument. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.

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After you get the four easy motions you play harmonious chords with very little practice. No previous musical knowledge needed.

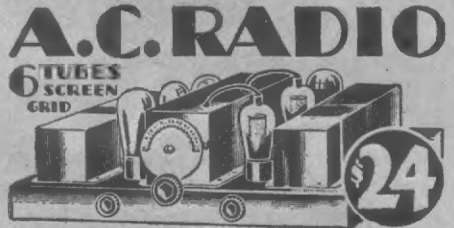
Easy Lessons
Even if you don't know one note from another, the 52 printed lessons and clear pictures make it easy to learn quickly. Pay as you play.

GIVEN when you enroll
—a sweet toned HAWAIIAN GUITAR, Carrying Case and Playing Outfit—
Value \$15 to \$20
No extras—everything included

WRITE AT ONCE for attractive offer and easy terms you have everything to gain. A postcard will do. ACT!

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9th Floor, Woolworth Bldg., Dept. 235, New York, N. Y.
Approved as a Correspondence School Under the Laws of the State of New York—Member National Home Study Council



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Why discard your present good set when you can electrify it for only \$6.85, and banish the annoyance and expense of buying new "B" batteries?

Over 100,000 Townsend "B" Power Units In Use
Hooked up in a few minutes. Use same tubes—no changes. You'll be amazed at the improvement in reception and distance getting. Send name and address today for full details, proof and Free Trial Offer.

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734 Townsend Street Chicago, Illinois



Most Amazing INVENTION in 25 years "Cleans Up" for Agents

**FREE MACHINE
FOR AGENTS**

**\$90
WEEKLY IN
SPARE TIME!**

Men, here is a wonder—the most sensational invention of the age! If you're looking for a rapid fire seller—an item that nets you 100% profit—an item that sells itself to 7 out of 10 men in a demonstration—I've got it in Ve-Po-Ad, the amazing new vest pocket adding machine.

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ACTION AUTOMATIC**
*Pull the Trigger—
Out Pops a Cigarette*

Patented

\$79

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Super-fine linen
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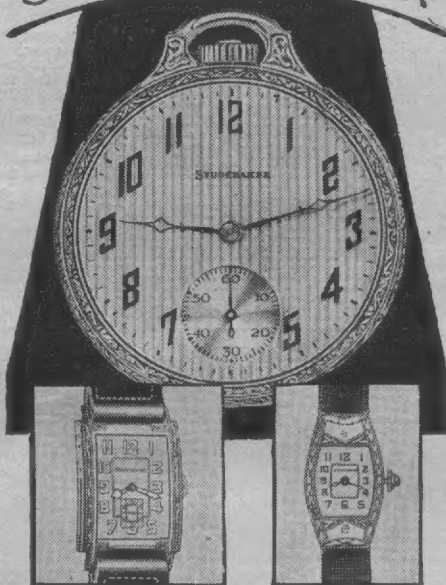
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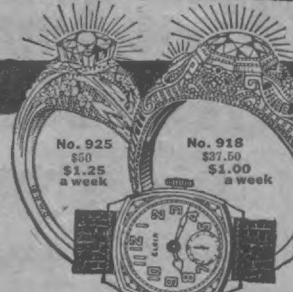
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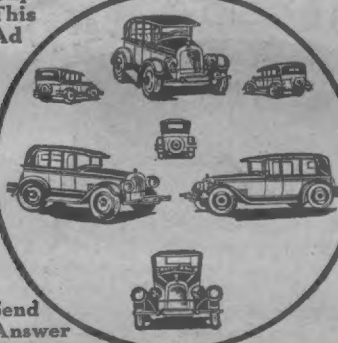
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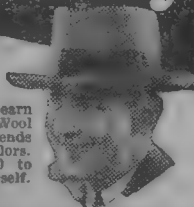
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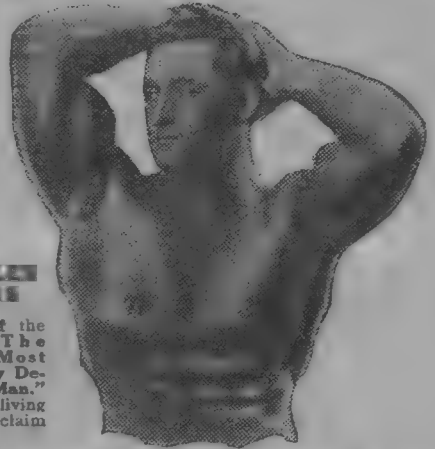
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34x4 1-2	3.50	1.45
30x5	3.55	1.75
33x5	3.55	1.75
29x4.40	3.35	1.10
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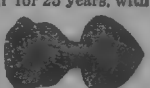
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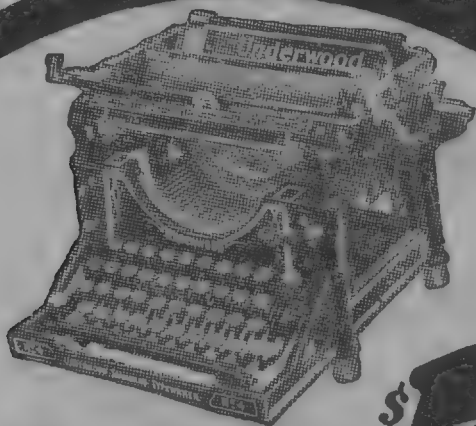
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GROWS NEW HAIR HERE IS PROOF

Letters such as these come here daily; come in and read them:

Mr. George MacDougall of 316 West 15th St., N. Y. C., writes: About the only way I can express my gratitude to you is to advise you to permit people to come here and see the hair I am growing from your compound after being bald over 25 years. It is simply astounding.

Mr. J. De Carlos of the famous vaudeville team of De Carlos and Granada writes: It is with great pleasure that I am writing you. After using almost every hair remedy on the market and visiting the best hair specialists in the country without any results, I want to say that your compound has really amazed me. It is growing hair all over my head. I certainly am happy that I noticed your ad. and I want to thank you for having a remedy of that kind.

Mr. Michael Nardelli of 76 Brook St., Scarsdale, N. Y., writes: I've been using your hair compound now for about two months, and I want to thank you for its great work. I haven't a single trace of dandruff and my hair seems to have ceased falling. I already gave advice to the boys in the neighborhood and they will undoubtedly order jars. I will send for another when I finish this one.

Linday's New Hair Compound is the formula of a famous German physician and scientist. It was perfected after 30 years of intense research and Never Fails to grow new hair from all live follicle left within the scalp. It will dissolve all dandruff and correct every unhealthy condition of the hair.

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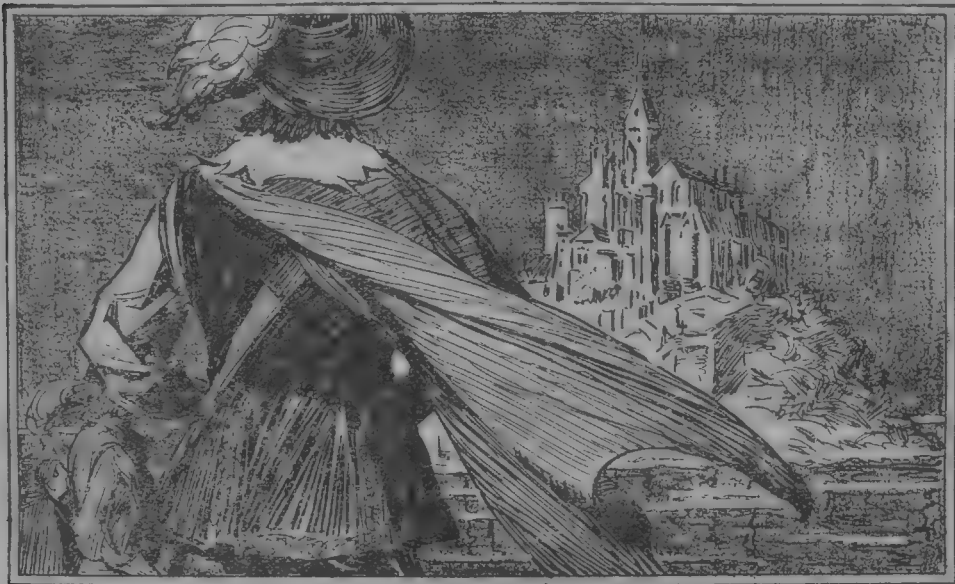
ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME 206

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1929

NUMBER 1



Cyrano

Fighter, drinker, poet, rogue—all of these and more was Cyrano, who rode so gayly into the intrigue that was shaking Louis XIII's kingdom of France

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Down the Coast of Barbary," "Loot Royal," etc.

CHAPTER I.

—MAKES ENGAGEMENTS WHEN DRUNK.

ADUST-COVERED, travel-weary cavalier dismounted from a very lame horse at the Tavern of the Three Kings, toward noon of a warm Spring day. He had obviously ridden

far and hard, for he was spent with fatigue and stiff in the knees. He yielded his reins to the host and pointed to his lame beast.

"A stone—I cannot dislodge it," he croaked. "Have it attended to at once. Fetch me wine, a bite to eat. And quick about it, you rascal!"

Cyrano—pronounced see-rah-no, with a slight accent on the last syllable.

The surly rider staggered across the little courtyard and vanished in the tavern. The host shrugged and called angrily for a groom. Little did any of them imagine that upon this lamed foot of a horse hung the lives of men, the fate of kingdoms, the destinies of unborn generations. This stone wedged between hoof and shoe created invisible circles which reached out and out, lapsing at the years to come.

Destiny, however surprising, is never illogical. True, the Three Kings was a shabby tavern, haunted by grooms and lackeys and cutthroats and loose women, but it lay just within the Barrier St. Jacques. A rider coming into Paris by the Orleans route would quite naturally stop at the Three Kings—if forced to stop by thirst and a lame beast.

Not that Paris cared for riders from the South. In this Spring of 1642, Paris was ruling itself in happy-may-care fashion. Paris was its own little world; the court was a separate world entirely, and now the court was out of Paris. King Louis XIII and Cardinal de Richelieu were both in Narbonne, directing the war against Spain, and the court had been moved south to Tarascon; another army was in Savoy, pushing the war against Italy. Paris, which loved the careless king for his vices and hated the too-patriotic cardinal for his virtues, was content to have them both far away, for it could go about its own business unconcernedly.

The cavalier who entered the dark wineshop, blinking, was of the court. This was very obvious in his garments and bearing and face; a thin-featured, intolerantly proud man who looked about him in unconcealed disgust.

The place was empty except for a shaggy, tattered man who sat at the only window-table, bending over

among empty wine bottles, writing furiously; at his elbow were ink-horn and sand-box. He did not so much as glance up at the visitor.

"Out of the way, fellow—I desire this table," said the arrogant noble.

THE writer looked up abstractedly. He was of most extraordinary appearance. He had long, uncut hair, a finely sensitive mouth, liquid dark eyes and a very large, hooked nose; his face was much cut about by sword-scars, lending him a most bizarre look. His once-rich clothes were shabby rags; his unkempt hair was a filthy mat. He was unshaved. His hands left smears on the paper whereon he wrote. He was very pale—a sure sign that he was drunk, had the cavalier known it. But the cavalier knew nothing of Paris or its characters.

"You heard me!" snapped the weary, haughty noble. "Out of the way, gutter scum!"

The two eyes, like stars set in a mass of dirt, peered up at him. A maudlin laugh broke from the writer.

"Ha! M. de Luynes, grandson of the great marshal, gentleman of the court, noble, warrior, in all his splendor. And Cyrano de Bergerac, grandson of the great fish monger, wastrel of the back alleys, poet, gambler, in all his squalor! Here's contrast for you!"

"Eh! You know me?" exclaimed Luynes.

"I know every one," muttered Cyrano, and with shaking hand reached for his wine cup and drained it. Luynes regarded him with insolent disdain.

"Move, *canaille!* Dog, make way for your betters. Writing, indeed! Since when did gutter cats learn writing? Away with you!"

As he spoke, with his gloved hand he swept paper, ink-horn and sand-box

to the floor. Then he started back a step, hand going to sword, swift, startled alarm in his face.

Cyrano had come to his feet suddenly. His eyes blazed; in his scarred countenance was such unspeakable fury, such a wild and reckless burst of rage, that the cavalier drew back before it.

Hot words poured from the poet-warrior's lips.

"Beast that you are—to touch a letter to *her*! Oh, foul hands!"

Luyne perceived the drunken menace, and half bared his blade—but too late. Cyrano had snatched up an empty bottle; his arm moved with the rapidity of light. Struck above the ear, the hapless noble coughed and collapsed in a limp mass, as the bottle smashed.

Cyrano blinked, then stared down in gaping, slack-jawed realization; upon the instant, he was half sobered. Dimly the penalties pierced to his brain; the archers of the watch, imprisonment in the Châtelet, perhaps the scaffold or gibbet. His hand groped for a full wine bottle, and he lifted it to his lips, gulped down the wine, then lowered the bottle and stared anew. After a moment he leaned over and touched the fallen man. There was no mark where the bottle struck, but Luyne was dead. His skull had been broken.

The eyes of Cyrano darted about. They were alone; the swift incident had passed unseen. He staggered, then stooped and with an effort lifted the limp body, placing it in the corner of the window-seat. He arranged it there in a natural position, and pulled down the wide-brimmed beaver over the eyes of the cavalier.

A part of his brain was clearly enough at work. Now he stooped and

retrieved his scattered writing materials, picked up his unfinished letter, and stood swaying as he eyed it drunkenly.

"Ha, my good Bergerac—my good poet, my good lover, my good rogue!" he muttered. "What though she will never read it! This is little short of sublime. But now—"

He thrust the letter into his pocket, sagged down into his seat, poured more wine.

THE hapless Cyrano was already in the depths of debt, drunkenness and dissipation, with all his future a hopeless blank. Cursed with a nose larger than that of other men, a hooked eagle's beak that gave him the look of a bird of prey, he had entered the guards.

Pretending to be a Gascon noble, and taking the name of Bergerac, he had won a place among the swashbuckling Gascon fighters. He served the sword well, becoming the deadliest rapier in all Paris, so that men laughed at him and his nose no more, but feared him, and wisely so.

However, the sword served him ill. He was repeatedly wounded on campaign.

But that was nothing; the tragedy came in Paris. One day, embroiled with a crowd of lackeys, he mistook a trained monkey for a man and killed the animal.

Thus ended Cyrano the guardsman. Laughed out of his world by mirth that would not down, he forswore the sword. Vowing he would never wear rapier again, he turned to the philosopher Gassendi at the College of Lisieux, and took up the pursuit of letters. For the past year, gambling, dissipation and the dregs of Paris had claimed him. Money he had none,

save what he could borrow or win at dice. His family shunned him. Thus, at the age of twenty-three.

There was, however, this peculiarity about M. Savinien de Cyrano; what he lacked in scruple, he made up in roaring mirth, and he had respect for no man.

The host came into the place with a tray of wine and stopped short, looking around for the cavalier. As it chanced, Cyrano was not known at this particular tavern; his own haunts were across the Seine. He looked up and beckoned.

"Here we are—your man has gone to sleep. Leave the wine. I can use it."

The host came to the table, glanced at the apparently sleeping cavalier, and set down his tray. He regarded Cyrano dubiously.

"As to payment, *monsieur*—there is already a matter of three crowns for wine."

"Leave it, leave it," and Cyrano waved his hand grandly. "I have not finished."

The host, being impressed by the fact that his drunken and questionable customer could write, decided to chance payment, and departed. Cyrano poured more wine and gulped it down. Then he stared at the limp figure opposite.

"Think, M. de Bergerac, think!" he murmured. "Think yourself out of this in a hurry, my poor Savinien! This man is a grandson of the great Marshal de Luynes, who sprang, it is true, from the lesser *noblesse*; but you spring from no *noblesse* whatever. Now you must use your wits, or you'll end like poor Villon on the gibbet! Come, wits, come! Pox on me! If I were not so drunk—let's see, now."

He leaned far over the table, and his long arms sent prying fingers over the body of Luynes. It was true that the

latter came of a renowned family, but for a year or two past had fallen into some disgrace and had been exiled to his estates. This would not avail his slayer, however.

Cyrano pulled forth gold pieces, silver coins, a fat silken purse, papers, a sealed packet and an unsealed letter. He sat blinking at them for a moment, dizzily, until his eyes focused upon the letter. It was addressed to M. d'Effiat, at his chambers in the Louvre.

"*Mordious!* What's this?" Cyrano clutched at it, spread it open. "Effiat? That will be the cousin of M. le Grand Equerry Cinq-Mars, favorite of the king! Here, now!"

The portion of his befuddled brain which was a trifle sober, slowly comprehended the lines of writing that greeted him:

DEAR COUSIN:

Make use of the bearer. He is not acquainted with our plans, but is favorable to our cause. He has great ability, and can be of extreme value to us. As yet no further news.

CINQ-MARS.

Cyrano did not attempt to pierce beyond externals. The instant he read this epistle, he perceived salvation in it. Effiat obviously was not acquainted with M. de Luynes, who was not named in the letter. A wide grin showed Cyrano's large and even teeth, and his sudden roaring laugh shook the glasses on the table.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, sweeping coins, purse and sealed packet into his pocket. "Quick, now! M. Savinien de Cyrano, you are no more; I baptise thee M. le Marquis de Bergerac! Aye, a marquis at the very least. Off with you, before they examine yonder clay! Here's a friend, shelter, money—a whole purse of gold pieces! But you can't appear at the Louvre in this

shape. Stop on the Pont Neuf, aye! A barber, a decent suit; half an hour at most. Then to the Louvre, with honest lies ready to hand. Ha, there's fortune in it! On with the game, Cyrano!"

He perceived the host at the door, called to him, drained a last flagon of wine.

"Here, my good man," and Cyrano gave him a gold piece. "Keep the change, I beg of you. Let this gentleman sleep; he said not to waken him for an hour at least."

The inn-keeper bowed and scraped. Cyrano gathered his rags about him, and sauntered forth. Once in the street, he turned and made for the Pont Neuf as rapidly as his unsteady legs would bear him. Oddly enough, his muscles were seldom affected by liquor, but it fired his imagination, stimulated his brain—and usually ruined him completely.

IN his room on the second floor of the Louvre sat M. Claude d'Effiat, Sieur d'Ernonville, titular Abbé of the great fortress of Mont St. Michel. He was the only gentleman at present occupying the Louvre palace of the Kings of France. Three years with the embassy in Venice had ended a few months since, when he found himself invested through Cinq-Mars's influence with the splendid fief of Mont St. Michel, which had been stripped from the Duc de Guise.

A touch of fever had kept Effiat from going south with the court; and now he was the picture of a great noble, with his frills and laces, his pomades and dogs and horses, his daintiness and his lechery, as became the cousin of the royal favorite. But in the eyes of Claude d'Effiat was a steely glint, in the set of his long and narrow

jaw was a firmness, such as his debauched cousin Cinq-Mars never knew.

He was a handsome gentleman, not well known at court. When the rebellion of Guise, in the previous year, sent that prince into exile, many men had desired that marvelous abbey of wealth and beauty, the impregnable fortress of Mont St. Michel; Effiat had obtained it. True, he had never seen his abbey, but he enjoyed its net revenues of 20,000 livres, which was the main thing.

"*Monsieur*, a gentleman with a letter. The Marquis de Bergerac."

Mervaut, Effiat's lackey, stood in the door. He was a wide-shouldered rogue with heavy, sullen features, but had a way with women, and had served Effiat well.

"Admit him," said Effiat carelessly, and surveyed himself in his mirror. If M. d'Effiat was handsome, his raiment was superb. His suit of scarlet silk, slashed with silver and sewed in patterns with seed pearls, had cost nine thousand crowns. His narrow features held pride and arrogance, with some reason; also, he could be charming when he so desired. Hard and cold as steel were his gray eyes, yet at times, as those who had faced his rapier well knew, they could glow and scintillate with sparks of cruel light.

Cyrano entered and bowed—not the same man who had sat in the Three Kings, but a Cyrano cleansed, shorn, shaved, clad in passable garments, with a magnificent silver-hilted poniard at his girdle. The silver hilt bore, after the fashion under Henri IV, very elaborately chased arms, and Cyrano had paid two livres for it at a booth on the Pont Neuf.

"You seek me, *monsieur*?" asked Effiat, surveying his visitor curiously. Cyrano bowed and presented his letter.

"This will speak for me, *monsieur*," he rejoined. He was apparently quite master of himself, but his glassy eye and thick tongue told a different story. "I have but just reached Paris; my fool of a lackey took my spare horse and portmanteau to my lodgings, and I hastened here without awaiting a change of clothes."

"You did well," said Effiat dryly. "At this hour to-morrow I shall be gone. Ha! The hand of Cinq-Mars! You are from the South?"

CYRANO assented and twirled his mustaches with his best Gascon air, as Effiat scanned the paper. If his assumed manner of Gascony had fooled all the Gascons in the guards, it was assuredly good enough to deceive *Sieur d'Effiat*.

"Alexandre Hercule Savinien de Cyrano, Marquis de Bergerac, at your service, *monsieur*!" he declaimed grandly. "I have been for some years with the army in Italy, and have had the honor of commanding a regiment for His Majesty the King of Hungary; but upon coming into my estates returned to France and had the pleasure of meeting your very excellent and worthy cousin. Since my time is my own, he suggested that I might settle certain business in Paris and—"

"Pray be seated, *monsieur*. I am charmed to make your acquaintance," said Effiat. "Most unfortunately, I am compelled to leave Paris to-morrow. It would give me great pleasure if you would accompany me to my abey of Mont St. Michel."

"There or to the moon," said Cyrano, refusing the proffered chair. "No, no wine, I beg of you! I have drunk too much already. I am mortified at appearing in these miserable garments, *monsieur*, and beg of you to

excuse my appearance and lay it to my anxiety to present myself."

Effiat was somewhat astonished at the words of this strange marquis, but they showed him the truth—or a little of it—and he broke into a laugh.

"A frank confession, M. de Bergerac; you are absolved!" he exclaimed. "You have lodgings, then? Or may I offer you hospitality?"

"Thank you, *monsieur*, I am provided," said Cyrano.

"Very well. You are weary, you have business—suppose we appoint a meeting for the morrow? That is to say, if your affairs will permit a departure."

Cyrano gestured magnificently. "My affairs are not many. Chief of them is the excellent Barsac they used to have at that tavern behind the Palais Cardinal, at the corner of the Rue des Bon Enfants—the *cru* of '35. An admirable wine, *monsieur*! It is like the ichor of the gods. No, that's not the word either. Nectar and ambrosia—eh?"

"Correct." Effiat chuckled softly. "Shall we meet there at noon to-morrow, then?"

"With all my heart, *monsieur*," and Cyrano bowed profoundly. "Ready for campaign."

"Agreed, then!"

Cyrano left the Louvre in a most confused state; yet, at the back of his head, he remembered what had happened. He was to meet Effiat on the morrow and leave Paris with him; excellent! Meantime, he had a few debts to pay and must have clothes worthy of his new estate. The better to ponder this, he dropped into the first wine shop on the quay, one of many which catered for the gentlemen of the guards, and ordered something to eat and more to drink.

The meal steadied him if it did not sober him, and two more bottles of wine served to bring him into a very singular condition indeed. In the midst of his meal he felt something hard in his pocket and drew it forth. It was the sealed packet he had taken from M. de Luynes. He set it on the table, looked at it, turned it over, looked at it again.

A queer sort of sobriety seized upon him; a frozen sense of most deadly peril.

A silk cord tied about the packet was sealed, and with the seal of Cardinal de Richelieu. On the other side was an address: Père Hugo Carré, at the Novitiate of Preaching Friars, in Rue St. Jacques.

Founded by Richelieu for his own purposes, this establishment of Dominicans embraced the whole system of espionage and news reports started by Père Joseph, the "Gray Cardinal," and greatly developed since his death. Cyrano, like every one in Paris, knew that it were better to stand as a felon before the high court of Parliament than to incur the anger of Père Carré. What was more to the point, he now understood that M. de Luynes had carried a private letter, and also dispatches from Richelieu to Père Carré; and these dispatches now lay under his hand!

"Devil fly away with me!" swore Cyrano, hastily putting the packet out of sight. "I only wish he would! What now? If I destroy these letters, every spy in France will seek to unearth the slayer of Luynes; were I hidden in the Bastille, they would uncover me! If, on the other hand—by the saints!"

A startling idea had come to him, an amazing idea; it was fraught with peril enough, but it was his only chance.

He seized his wine flagon and drained it, staring wide-eyed at the wall. Of course, he dared not lie to Père Carré, who could discover all about him within an hour's time; yet, why not?

Cyrano ordered another bottle of wine.

WITHIN the long gray building in Rue St. Jacques there was a large and curious room. Books and manuscript cases lined the walls. At the head of a huge and massive table where four secretaries were busy among documents and ink-pots, sat a man with long and shrewd visage, probing eyes, tight lips. To this table and this man came letters, reports, messengers from all France and half the world besides.

The armies of Richelieu were poorly trained rabbles; his victories were won in Rue St. Jacques. Daily couriers departed thence, bearing the gist of this far-flung news system, boiled down into succinct words by the worthy father superior, Père Carré. In these latter days the great cardinal was wasting away, dying by inches, and all details were left to others; even his letters were to go unsigned until his death at the year's end, thanks to the ulcers which left him helpless.

Père Carré opened documents, scanned each with swift gaze, and spoke. One secretary took down the summary to be incorporated in the daily report to the cardinal at Narbonne. Another took down the reply to the epistle itself. A third took down any further letters occasioned by the paper. The system was swift, sure and comprehensive; it gave Richelieu a great advantage over his ill-informed foes or rivals for power, such as Cinq-Mars, who worked often at cross-purposes.

A bell tinkled. A monk entered.

"Reverend father, a courier with dispatches from Narbonne."

The superior made a gesture and the secretaries, dropping their work, left the room. A moment later Cyrano was ushered in. He was deadly pale, and made a profound bow as he fumbled in his pocket with shaking fingers.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "by chance I have come into possession of certain dispatches, which I believe should be placed in your hands. By your leave."

He stiffly extended a paper. Père Carré took it, opened it, and stared up again at Cyrano in startled astonishment.

"What's this, *monsieur*!" he exclaimed. "It appears to be a letter addressed to Mlle. de Gisy; from the opening sentence, indeed, a letter which—"

A deep groan burst from Cyrano.

"Your pardon, your pardon—oh, the saints deliver me! What have I done? Here, *monsieur*, is the proper packet."

He held out the sealed packet and repocketed his own letter. Père Carré eyed him sharply and perceived something of the truth.

"Who are you, *monsieur*?"

"M. Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac."

The brows of the father superior lifted a little. He had, obviously, heard of M. de Bergerac. Then he gestured to the table.

"Be seated, *monsieur*. I have ordered refreshments; you will honor me by partaking of them while I glance through these documents. You did not bring them from Narbonne, I gather?"

"No, *monsieur*," said Cyrano in a dead voice. He was perspiring heavily as he sat down.

A lay brother entered with a tray

and set it on the table, and Cyrano was not averse to the excellent wine which greeted him. None the less, he was aware of his peril, and kept a sharp eye on the father superior.

PÈRE CARRÉ ran through the papers with practised eye, then picked up one for closer reading; unsigned, it was in the writing of Cardinal Mazarin, the secretary and most trusted confidant of Richelieu. As Père Carré read, his expression changed; his eyes widened in astonishment and alarm, and his thin lips were pursed up. Then, with a swift glance at Cyrano, he swept all emotion from his face and read on.

At length he pushed aside the papers and regarded his guest with a certain intent appraisal. He knew the virtue of the maxim *In Vino Veritas*; but he did not know M. de Bergerac, whose brain was never more nimble than when half drowned in the proper fluid.

"Your hospitality, *monsieur*," declared Cyrano with gusto, "deserves my warmest thanks! I don't know when I've tasted rarer Chambertin."

"No matter, my son. Regarding these letters: how came you by them?"

Cyrano swallowed hard. "*Monsieur*, I sat in a tavern writing a letter—the very letter which I handed you in error. I do not know what tavern it was; I confess that since yesterday noon I have been drinking with Chevalier d'Harcourt and others, and have no remembrance of my whereabouts. Well, a gentleman entered the tavern, where I was alone. He was offensive. He was fresh from the South, said that M. de Richelieu was dying, said other things which I do not recall—about M. de Cinq-Mars and *Monsieur* the Duc d'Orleans. I have always had profound respect for His Eminence, *mon-*

sieur, ever since certain verses of mine received his approval, and I became angry at the slurs cast upon a great man by this cavalier. I am not certain what happened, but I believe that he is dead."

"What!" Père Carré's eyes widened sternly. "Dead? You killed him, miserable man?"

"At least, *monsieur*, I resented his disparagement of the cardinal. I found myself sitting there; certain papers had fallen to the floor. One was this packet, addressed to you. Another was a letter to one M. Effiat—"

"Eh? Effiat? You are certain?" demanded Père Carré sharply. "Where is it?"

Cyrano gestured vaguely. Great drops of sweat stood on his forehead.

"I do not know, *monsieur*. The tavern—ah, I recollect now! It was the Three Kings, in Rue St. Jacques. I brought here the packet addressed to you, and resolved to confess everything and throw myself upon your mercy, reverend father."

"One moment," said Père Carré, and struck a bell. A secretary entered. "Send to the tavern of the Three Kings in Rue St. Jacques—send a party of archers from the Châtelet. See if a traveler is injured or dead there; have all his papers and effects brought here at once. Hasten!" The secretary left. Père Carré turned again to Cyrano. "*Monsieur*, this is a most serious matter. You, if I recall, are in the guards?"

"No, *monsieur*." Cyrano opened his doublet to show a ragged scar at his throat. "I've served, been wounded, and resigned. I'm now a philosopher, save the mark! That is, if Gassendi can make me one. I strongly doubt it."

"He is more apt to make you a heretic," said the friar dryly. "I have

heard of you, M. de Bergerac; a swordsman, I believe. Hm! And a gentleman, since you have served in the guards. What is more to the point, you have intelligence. It pleases me."

Cyrano breathed more freely. He perceived that he was saved, and instantly his spirits rebounded in exuberant relief.

"Ah, good father, give that recommendation of me to poor Gassendi!" he cried. "Perhaps he will have some hope of me, if you vouch for my intelligence! Regarding this cavalier—"

"Let be, let be," said Père Carré, pursing up his lips. "You have rendered me a great service in bringing those papers here. A letter to Effiat, eh? Yes, my son, a great service! Had those documents fallen into the wrong hands—hm!"

Cyrano drained a bumper of wine at a draught. Père Carré looked at him, and suddenly spoke in a tone of decision.

"*Monsieur*, the letter you first showed me was addressed to Mlle. de Gisy. You know her?"

"No, my father," said Cyrano, astonished. "I—one day I saw her pass in the street. I looked after her, asked who she might be. I saw her but the once."

THE other frowned, eyed him sharply, saw that he spoke the truth. "Well, my son, I have something to propose to you: a very honorable engagement in the service of His Majesty."

Cyrano took instant alarm. He knew very well that he was dealing with a more subtle and deadly antagonist than any swordsman.

"Alas, how could I refuse such an offer!" he exclaimed earnestly. "Yet I have close relatives in the church,

and religion holds the first place in my life. I am leaving Paris to-morrow in order to fulfill a vow that I have too long postponed. I am making the pilgrimage to the abbey of Mont St. Michel, father."

"Indeed! That is most singular, my son, most singular!" Père Carré studied him with odd intentness at the mention of this particular destination. "And you leave to-morrow?"

"About noon, *monsieur*," said Cyrano.

"Hm! Would it be possible for you to pass this way to-morrow morning, my son?" said the good friar, with his most friendly air. "I recollect that in the chapel treasury we have a blessed amulet containing a fragment of feather said to have fallen from the wing of the archangel when he appeared to the holy St. Aubert and commanded the building of his church at the Mont. It is true, the authenticity of this relic is somewhat in dispute, but none the less it is a precious possession. We are in your debt for these dispatches, and if you will allow me to present this amulet to you, I shall be obliged. Upon your pilgrimage, you may well find it of benefit."

Cyrano was delighted, but he was by no means blinded to the facts in the case. Finding himself dismissed, with no further mention of M. de Luynes, he lost no time in leaving the building with all possible speed.

No sooner had Cyrano departed than Père Carré summoned a secretary and gave him explicit instructions regarding the late visitor.

"Discover everything!" he concluded. "Get men to work on the instant! The chief thing is the attitude of this Bergerac toward His Eminence. If he has been concerned with any plot, I must know it. If not, he can be of

inestimable use. He is of loose tongue, and inquiry at the College of Lisieux, perhaps from Gassendi, will soon determine the matter."

"Reverend father, you will have the conclusion in a report to-morrow morning."

Satisfied, Père Carré turned to his neglected dispatches, while he awaited further word about M. de Luynes and the letter to Effiat. Of the letter to Effiat, naturally, no trace was found.

CHAPTER II.

—AND KEEPS HIS ENGAGEMENTS WHEN SOBER.

OVERNIGHT was born a new Cyrano, a brave Cyrano, so altered that none who had known the beard-blurred, sunken features of his hopeless days would know them now, despite the eagle beak of a nose; for the drowned dark eyes had become fiercely proud, and as by miracle the whole man was filled with youth and eagerness. Here indeed was one who laughed and sang and fought; a lute in silken case was slung about his shoulder, and the pistols at either side of the ornate saddle were of chased and fluted brass. Cyrano carried no sword, however.

Here was one, too, who had fallen overnight into sober reflection. The Marquis de Bergerac had a clear memory of what had passed on the previous day, he knew he was treading a desperate, slippery path—and embarked upon it with a gay and confident abandon.

Nobly had he scouted the pawnshops. Now he was perfumed and scented as any Valois, brave in the most gorgeous Genoese cut velvet imaginable. The suit was richly glowing

purple, edged and pointed with gold, and the cloak was cut to match.

True, it had not been cut for Cyrano, as certain bloodstains might testify, but genius had triumphed above this sorry witness. Upon the velvet cloak were sewed seven stars in cloth-of-gold, forming an irregular pattern which quite concealed the stain and rent; a worthy dame had spent the entire night at this work, and had been well paid. Hat and plume were new, of the finest quality, and so were the high boots of red cordovan. At Cyrano's girdle shone the magnificent silver-hilted poniard purchased on the Pont Neuf. His horse was a splendid animal, worthy a duke at least.

Since the days of the great Bassompierre a more magnificent lord had seldom been seen, and those in the street stopped and stared after him, wondering what prince had come to Paris. And they had some excuse; Cyrano bore himself with majesty, while the proudly arrogant flash of his eye was a danger signal. Gold in his pocket, intrigue afoot—he was living, in thought and deed, the new self he had assumed. Here was, in sober truth, the Marquis de Bergerac.

It was two hours before noon. Cyrano rode across the Pont Neuf, twirled his mustaches at the glancing ladies, grimaced at Briocci's puppet show, where he had spitted that abominable, unlucky monkey, and turned his horse toward Rue St. Jacques. He was more than ready now to match his wits against those of the cardinal's chief agent; a creature of impulse, M. de Bergerac had discarded with his old personality all fears and hesitation.

He found Père Carré in the same room where he had been received the previous day, and the father superior greeted him most cordially; whereat

Cyrano took instant warning. The promised reliquary, a handsomely chased locket of gold in the shape of a star, upon a golden chain, was produced and placed about his neck with an appropriate blessing, and was devoutly received by Cyrano.

"I have heard good words of your devotion to the king and the church, *monsieur*," said Père Carré. "Has your recent business with M. d'Effiat resulted to your satisfaction?"

Cyrano blinked. "That remains to be seen; you are aware of it, eh?"

"I am aware of many things, M. de Bergerac. Come! I have a reason for asking you to be frank with me," and the penetrating eyes bored into him. "That letter to M. d'Effiat—"

Cyrano gave no sign of his inward alarm and consternation. To impersonate a marquis was fully as grave an offense as to kill a nobleman; and he had announced himself at the Louvre under his assumed title. Spies had been set upon him, evidently—

"*Monsieur*," he said gravely, "I confess that yesterday I was drunk; I am not well aware of what I did or what I said. I can only beg of you to ascribe to my intentions the merit they deserve. As I recall, I have an engagement to meet M. d'Effiat at noon, and to ride with him to Mont St. Michel. The reason, I do not know. Have I said enough?"

"Enough to hang you, my son, if need were." Père Carré was silent for a moment; in this moment, and in those shrewd appraising eyes, lay deep peril. Then the father superior smiled. "However, *monsieur*, I believe you; and I know your devotion to His Majesty, of which you bear honorable proofs upon your body. You are a gentleman by training, if not by birth. So, I am going to risk a little in order

to gain much, and give you an errand at Mont St. Michel."

HALF in relief at these words, half in deeper alarm, Cyrano remained silent; for once his dark gaze was intent and piercing. He knew that his entire destiny might well be hinging on this interview. Now Père Carré went on speaking, in a low and purring voice, and Cyrano girded himself for a battle of wits.

"My son, in the very household of France are traitors. Rebellion and treachery threaten her from within and without—that is to say, as a very present possibility. There is even some fear lest the most impregnable jewel of the crown, that fortress against which all the might of England was shattered, may be handed over to enemies. I speak of this same royal châteaueau and abbey of Mont St. Michel."

Cyrano looked wide-eyed. "But we are not at war with England?"

"We are at war with Austria; with Germany, Spain, Italy! The Huguenots are ready to rise in new rebellion. France itself rose in revolt last year under the princes of the blood, and is ready to rise again."

"Oh! That is true," said Cyrano, as though impressed by the fact.

"Further, the state is upheld by one man, at present; and against him, lesser men conspire. You are not a fool, my son."

Decidedly not. Cyrano knew now whither all this tended. It was generally enough whispered that Cinq-Mars plotted against Richelieu—and with Cinq-Mars were the Duc d'Orleans, the Prince of Sedan, and others. The Red Minister had enemies, more enemies than friends.

"And M. d'Effiat," murmured Cyrano thoughtfully, as if realizing it for

the first time, "is a near relative of the Grand Equerry, M. de Cinq-Mars!"

"Exactly," said the father superior, watching him with close scrutiny. "You go with him; excellent! I ask you to inspect Mont St. Michel. Regard its defenses, its guards, the possibility of the Mont or of its sister isle, Tombelainé, being delivered to an enemy. This service can be performed only by a gentleman of intelligence, of action, of initiative, by one who has the eye of a soldier. I know your record, *monsieur*, and am satisfied of your loyalty. Hence, I ask your aid."

"The matter," observed Cyrano as though to himself, "would of course depend upon the action to be pursued, were action necessary."

A trifle startled, Père Carré pondered this speech for a moment. Cyrano, as a matter of fact, had leaped from alarm to vast self-confidence. Instead of facing a cell, he was becoming an agent of Richelieu. Being an extremist in all things, it was natural that he should at once dart to the offensive.

"Hm!" said the friar. "Your exact meaning?"

"A question of scruple, good father." Cyrano twirled his mustache, gave Père Carré look for look. "Come, we are alone; let us be frank! I cannot ride with a man as his friend, and act the spy, make reports upon him, betray him. No, no! But, once convinced that this man was a traitor to his king—ah, that's another matter! That would call for action."

"So!" The thin lips of the friar curved slightly. "If there were cause for such action, as you have hinted—"

"Then, naturally, I should be in position to act," said Cyrano, with his engaging smile.

"By all means, by all means," said Père Carré. "However, we need not anticipate any emergency; this is merely a trip of inspection. We deal with the abbey, not with the abbot; the essential thing is a report upon the Mont and its condition."

CYRANO bowed in his best guardsman's manner. He did not intend to be put off in any such fashion.

"*Monsieur*, I thank you for the honor you do me! As you may be aware, the monks of Mont St. Michel have a manor in Paris, in Rue St. Etienne-des-Grecs. I have talked with certain of them and understand that they are inclined to be jealous of their prerogatives. Also, I believe that at the present time their prior holds himself as only a little less than St. Michel himself." Cyrano paused reflectively.

"So," he continued, "being compelled to use my intelligence, it is still possible that I might be required to take action. And in case of this emergency which we do not anticipate, it were very sad if I did not have anything to show that I held a cardinal higher in the scale than an abbot or a prior! As you so truly said, *monsieur*, one must risk a little if one desires to gain much."

Père Carré regarded him half sourly, half admiringly, then broke into a slow smile.

"Upon my word, you should be a diplomat!"

"Thank you, *monsieur*. A diplomat requires rhythm, however; being a poet I have only rime." And Cyrano twirled his mustache, his black eyes dancing and glowing.

The superior nodded amusedly, opened a drawer, and sat down at the table, quill in hand. The quick eyes of Cyrano perceived the paper to be some

sort of ready-written form, which Père Carré was signing. Then, sanded and cleaned, the paper was folded, and with the aid of a candle already burning, the superior sealed it. From the drawer he took a purse and extended paper and purse to Cyrano.

"There, *monsieur*, this will serve your purpose should emergency arise. And His Eminence is not niggardly; this will serve your ordinary expenses. There is but one thing I require of you, M. de Bergerac, at all costs. At all costs, you comprehend?"

Thus speaking, Père Carré rose, and his gaze became piercingly intent.

"And this one thing?"

"Is that the impregnable western bulwark of our beloved France should not pass into hostile hands."

Cyrano bowed.

Two minutes later he was in the saddle again, riding for the Pont Neuf. He was extremely satisfied with himself, as he well might be.

"Worthy father superior, how well the Marquis de Bergerac fitted into your purposes—and how well you fitted into his! Moreover, you expected to send forth a spy, and instead you dispatch an ambassador! I'm afraid M. de Richelieu would not be pleased to know you'd given me this little paper, whatever it is. Decidedly, you'll never step into the shoes of that sly little Mazarin. So Cinq-Mars conspires, and Richelieu cannot catch him at it, but hopes to catch cousin Effiat, eh?"

The thought sobered him. Effiat, he knew well, was a powerful man; Cyrano was playing with fire there.

PRECISELY upon the stroke of noon the tavern behind the Palais Cardinal witnessed the meeting of two lordly gentlemen. Sieur d'Effiat, garbed in superb riding clothes, the

Cross of St. Michel blazing on his cloak, had just arrived when the magnificent figure of M. de Bergerac swung into the courtyard and dismounted.

"Greetings, my friend, greetings!" exclaimed Cyrano gustily. "Would you believe it, that rascally lackey of mine has absconded with half of my effects? I've just seen the provost about it, and they're astir at the Châtelet. There was a diamond worth above a thousand pistoles, a gift from His Eminence himself, not to mention certain jewels presented to me by grateful ladies, and a superb rapier which I had from the King of Hungary. Well, let be! I'm ready to ride with you to Mont St. Michel or the devil. Ho, there! Wine! The Barsac of '35!"

Effiat settled down at table with him. The lackey Mervaut brought them wine and commanded dinner, and after an approving drink Effiat fell into talk. Cyrano's grandiloquent personality quite fended off any doubts as to his estate; besides, his tale of service in armies abroad was plausible enough, and not uncommon.

"*Monsieur*," said Effiat with a certain deliberation, "I understand from my cousin that you bear the Cardinal no great love."

"Nor he me," and Cyrano's laugh rang out. "*Mordious!* That's why I left Paris in the old days, just between ourselves! A question of a lady, who favored a handsome guardsman rather than a stingy minister of state—you comprehend?"

"Good," and Effiat chuckled. "However, *monsieur*, I have a purpose in my westward journey which is not concerned with cardinals. We ride into the country to visit a lady who is a sorceress. She rides on with us—of her own will or against it. We carry her to

my abbey of Mont St. Michel and talk pleasantly by the way. That is all."

"All?" Cyrano's jaw fell. "There is a sequel to that sort of comedy, *monsieur*, and it is not a comic sequel. Me, I do not care to be broken on the wheel for abduction!"

"Bah!" Effiat shrugged. "A sorceress has no protection from the law. And what's the law to me?"

True enough, and Cyrano nodded. While Cinq-Mars was Grand Equerry, favorite of the king and most powerful man in France after Richelieu, what indeed was the law to his cousin Effiat!

"Do you, by any chance, know the Tour de Gisy?" said Effiat.

There was a short silence. The home of Mlle. de Gisy! Effiat's words stunned Cyrano, but he gave no sign of it.

"Hm!" he returned at length. "Wasn't there some old scandal about *Sieur de Gisy*—he was a lover of Chevreuse, I think?"

"He is dead. His daughter, who is a sorceress, occupies his place. Now, she has inherited an old dispute with Mont St. Michel over certain lands which she and the abbey both claim. It may be that she will ride willingly with us, to settle this matter. In any case, I have ordered a coach to await us at Palaiseau, which is not far from the Tour de Gisy. Is it clear?"

"Not altogether," said Cyrano. "If she's not willing to come, how can we use force against a sorceress?"

Effiat looked at him, found Cyrano's dark eyes twinkling, and broke into a laugh.

"Bah! Sorcery troubles me little, nor you! She lives there almost alone, and studies the stars. She has red hair, therefore is a sorceress. It's simple."

Cyrano shook his head. He waited until Mervaut had served their meal,

then drained his winecup and turned to Effiat earnestly. As a matter of fact, he knew all the gossip about Marianne de Gisy; he knew that she studied the stars and was therefore reputed a witch.

"FROM a philosophic standpoint, the experiment of mating with a sorceress would be most interesting," Cyrano observed, whereat Effiat smiled thinly. "But, *monsieur*, I gather that you are in love with this lady? Then, I assure you, reflect! You are making a grievous error."

"Eh? In loving her?" demanded Effiat amused.

"No; in forcing her to ride with you. Now, then, suppose I ride to the Tower without you! For you to use force would be fatal; for me to use force, if need be, would in no way involve you. You might dispatch a courier at once, saying that you are sending me in your place, being forced to post for Mont St. Michel at once, and so forth. You comprehend?"

Effiat stared at him rather blankly.

"No; devil take me if I do!"

Cyrano broke into his hearty laugh, and stretched one hand across the table.

"Come! In me you have found a friend, a poet, a troubadour, a magician. I guarantee that if you leave the lady to me I can bring her willingly to Mont St. Michel. The land dispute; over and above that, a dozen other reasons—bah! It's the easiest thing imaginable. Besides, the devil himself couldn't make love in a coach."

"True," said Effiat with a laugh. "You think you can bring her willingly, eh?"

"Upon my honor! Of her own will, and in your coach. Come, my dear Effiat, have faith! Leave these matters to

me. You see these seven stars of my escutcheon! I'm something of a sorcerer myself. We shall ride, she and I, take what comes, sun or rain or wind, love or hate! With a lady to serve, a road to ride, a lute to pluck, a sword to swing—devil take all butts and ifs! Leave the thing to me, and do you play the fine lover when the time comes. You want her at the Mont; I'll have her there for you!"

The swift blaze of those dark eyes, the infectious burst of laughter, kindled a responsive spark in the cold gaze of Effiat. The brain of Cyrano went dancing on in a furious gust of eloquence, his eyes aflame, until Effiat checked him.

"Say no more, Bergerac! You have the right of it. I'll give you a letter to the lady, telling her—"

"That I'm a student of the occult sciences," cut in Cyrano.

"Eh?" Effiat grimaced. "You cannot trick her!"

"Nonsense! I know more about wizardry than she does, I warrant!" and Cyrano's laugh filled the place like a trumpet blare. "There's never been a Bergerac burned at the stake for magic; but all the same I'm not so simple. I learned a bit of it in Hungary, and more when I accompanied an embassy to the court of Poland. So why not?"

Effiat shrugged, then put out his hand and smiled as he gripped that of Cyrano.

"Good. I thank you, and am in your debt! Willy-nilly, you'll bring her?"

"Upon my honor—if I must bundle her off neck and crop."

Effiat rose. "Then I'll to the Louvre. Wait here, and Mervaut will fetch you back the letter. He'll also accompany you as lackey, since you have no man. The coach will await you at

Palaiseau. You're ready to ride? Good. You can reach Berny to-night, the Tour de Gisy some time to-morrow. Agreed?"

"With all my heart!"

"Then *au revoir*, until we meet at the Mont. Mervaut! Follow me."

And, bowing to Cyrano, *Sieur d'Effiat* departed in all haste.

"SOUR devil—and I must ride with you, eh?" muttered *Cyrano*, eyeing the lurching back of *Mervaut*. He filled his cup again and drained it, set it down, felt in his pocket, and drew forth the crumpled letter he had written on the preceding day. "Come, this will bear copying, and while he's writing his precious epistle I'll be doing mine."

Writing materials were brought by the waiter, and *Cyrano* set about copying out his letter which had been addressed to *Marianne de Gisy*. Nor was it the first letter he had ever written her, though she had seen none of them. When he had finished he leaned back and inspected it.

"Ah, sublime!" he murmured admiringly. "Better than the others—and this seems like to be delivered, for a miracle! Curious that it should come about so. I see a face pass in the street, and straightway become a fool! Well, I may not find her so pleasant on closer acquaintance. Probably her teeth will be bad or her person foul-smelling—it's usually so. Alas! Must a sorceress lose the love of *Cyrano* because she does not use perfume?"

He broke into a peal of harsh laughter which betrayed the irony in his words and in his heart toward all the world, including himself. Undoubtedly the ancestors of *Cyrano* in their native isle had eaten of that Sardinian herb which engenders bitterness of spirit.

His letter pocketed, his meal finished, his horse fed, *Cyrano* applied himself to the bottle until *Mervaut* returned to the tavern, riding a good horse. He dismounted and gave *Cyrano* a sealed letter addressed to *Mlle. de Gisy*.

"You are riding with me?" demanded *Cyrano*.

"Yes, *M. le Marquis*," said *Mervaut* respectfully.

"I perceive you're well trained, *Mervaut*. See that you don't forget it: because if you do I'll take a stick to your back in proper fashion. You comprehend?"

"Certainly, *M. le Marquis*!"

"To horse, then!" and *Cyrano* rose from the table and called for his own mount.

CHAPTER III.

—DELIVERS A LETTER.

THE Tour de Gisy was an ancient, half ruined keep, where had once been a great château and open park; house and trees had the air of things blasted. In past years the pride of *Gisy* had indeed been smitten to the quick, and the place now stood uncared for, looking at the world from blank eyes; despite the presence of a woman, it still bore the bitter and fiercely aloof aspect of its dead master. Solitary amid its few trees, the tower stood bleak and black, shunning men and shunned by men.

The woman dwelt here alone, with her father's two old servants; rumor said she was a sorceress from *Brittany*, whence came the family, and where the family lands lay. That she had the evil eye was no secret. Thus the Tour de *Gisy* assumed a still blacker hue in the sight of men.

There were no tenants. Those who must needs come this way of an even-tide looked at the lone dark turret against the sky and signed themselves as they scurried past. The only hamlet was two miles away; hereabouts was a lonely countryside, scarred by the wars of the League.

Upon a late spring afternoon, Marianne de Gisy sat in the sunlight upon the flat roof of the old tower. At one side stood a covered telescope on its stand. Before her was a table, piled with huge tomes; she was working over a volume, copying out the figures of some long dead student of the stars. About the roof ran a parapet, breast-high.

The heiress of Gisy, to a casual eye, might have been twenty-six, or forty; as for beauty, that was a matter of opinion. The king detested red hair, and the king set the fashion. Common folk saw no beauty in hair like raw gold, shimmering with a halo in the sunlight. The face below was not lovely; it was sad and strong and weary in repose—all but the eyes. These leaped out in quick lightning blue, transformed the whole face; and when they fell into sleepy reflection the vivid eagerness was lost.

Few men sensed the peculiar wise sweetness of this face, its grave kindliness, nor even the fair rippling womanliness of the body below; they saw the mass of flaming hair, and swiftly looked away, and that was the end of it.

A startled cry, from somewhere caused Marianne to lift her head sharply, staring at the opening of the stairs that ran down to the entrance court. The cry came again; then a clatter of wooden shoes on the stairs, and at the opening was revealed the head of an old woman.

"*Ma'm'selle!* They have come back, those men who were here! I said they were bad ones. Pierre has gone out to send them away, but they are bad ones, those!"

Marianne came to her feet and went to the parapet of the roof. She knew that a rabble of disbanded soldiers had passed that same morning, but any trouble was, to her, inconceivable. And yet, as she looked down, she beheld the incredible come to pass under her very eyes. Absorbed as she had been in her work, it was all as sudden and sharp as the bursting of a summer storm.

Out there in front of the tower was Pierre, her father's old servant, running, staggering, hand pressed to side as he made for shelter of the entrance. And close behind him half a dozen ragged figures pursued with shouts and curses. The afternoon sun flashed on steel. Pierre faked. One of the ragged men leaped and struck, and Pierre fell. The others were upon him like wolves, and their blades took the life out of him. Far behind, two men on horses were just coming into sight.

THE woman, watching, uttered a swift, piercing cry. Then they looked up and saw her there at the parapet.

"Sorceress!" The yell leaped up at her, wolfish in its intensity. They shook their fists, brandished crimsoned weapons, leaped in the air and hurled imprecations. "Come down to us, sorceress! Come down and play with us!"

Marianne shrank back from those faces, all aflame with passion, with greed, with cruelty, with lust. So they had heard tales of her! They meant to pillage and slay—

The hollow crash of the iron-bound portals weakened her, caused her to

turn hastily to the stairway. The old crone had swung the massive doors shut; a few moments gained, at least! Marianne was down the stone stairs lightly as a dancing flame, and, in passing, snatched from the wall her father's sword.

She came into the lower hall, where the old dame now crouched in moaning terror. Outside they were smashing at the sturdy doors, hammering, yelling maudlin curses. Drunk, then! This explained it. They had obtained liquor and had come back here to seek her out.

Abruptly, the blows and voices fell silent. There was a new voice, ringing loud and clear; then a sharper, keener yell swept up from the pack. A pistol crashed out, followed by a second. A man screamed. What was going on out there? Without hesitation, Marianne leaped at the door and swung away its massive bar; the old servant protested wildly, frantically, but she wrenched open one of the doors, unheeding.

Outside— She remembered the two cavaliers now. One of them was sitting his horse, looking around, laughing, a pistol in his hand. Three silent figures lay sprawled before the entrance. The others were running, in wild flight, pursued by the second horseman. Now Cyrano, putting up his pistol, dismounted. He turned and saw Marianne standing there in the opening.

He caught his breath sharply; the sight of her burst upon him like a vision. For an instant he stared at her, eyes wide, and before his ardent, quivering eagerness a slow tide of red crept up her face. Then he swung off his hat and swept its plume in the dust with a low bow.

"Surely this is Mme. Thessala, she whom Horace sung, whose beauty drew down the moon!" he exclaimed. "Daughter of the sun, gloriously

crowned with fire and ruddy gold, I salute you! I came hither, seeking no goddess, but a mortal woman, one Mme. de Gisy—"

"Who stands before you," broke in Marianne, "and who owes you gratitude, *monsieur*." If the grandiloquence of Cyrano tempted a smile to her lips, it was banished by his very earnestness, by his astonishing and impulsive ardor. He produced a sealed paper and handed it to her.

"Here are my credentials, *mademoiselle*. M. d'Effiat prayed me to stop and make you his compliments and to place myself at your service. I am indeed honored that our arrival was timely. My lackey is attending to those rogues."

Marianne regarded him for a moment, then smiled.

"Ah! I had a courier from M. d'Effiat last night," she replied. "You are, then, M. le Marquis de Bergerac?"

"True, dear lady!" broke in Cyrano, a sonorous ring to his voice. "I cannot look into your eyes and live a lie! No, I'm called Marquis de Bergerac indeed, but my name is Cyrano. By the seven stars, Cyrano is name enough! And if it must bear title, then in God's love a title o' some meaning! Marquis of Poesy—Duke of Wine-bibbing—Prince of the Seven Stars. Aye, there it is! Marquis of the Seven Stars, *mademoiselle*, at your eternal service!"

If Marianne did not comprehend the mad words, at least she perceived a certain wild earnestness behind them, and with a quiet smile, held out her hand to Cyrano.

"Enter, *monsieur*," she said. "The house is yours; make yourself at home. I pray you, excuse me a space until I get my old nurse calmed. I have no other servants."

She vanished inside. Cyrano turned,

as Mervaut approached, and ordered the lackey to take care of the horses, remove the bodies, and make himself useful. Then he followed Marianne into the building.

NOW, fiercely exultant over the fortune which had brought him here at such a moment, the Marquis of Seven Stars strode up and down a somber room whose walls were adorned with tattered tapestry and old portraits. The furniture in the room consisted of but a large table, loaded down with books, and a few chairs. Laughing suddenly at some thought, Cyrano strode to the table, seized on the top-most book, and whistled amazedly when he had opened it. Then, fumbling under his doublet, he produced a folded letter.

When Marianne came into the room, Cyrano was standing at the window, and swung about to meet her.

"*Monsieur*, I owe you deepest gratitude," she said earnestly. "Pray consider yourself and your lackey as my guests. He must help us with the service, for we live simply here, but we can make shift. *Sieur d'Effiat*—"

"Has been called to his fief of Mont St. Michel," said Cyrano. "I am also bound thither, with pilgrimage in mind—and other things more important. But what's this I see?" He broke off, took a step to the table, and opened a book there. His astonished gaze went to Marianne. "The '*Clavicule*' of Solomon! And beneath it the work of Rabbi ben Chomer. Ha, a miracle, no less! To find these books of witchcraft and magic—"

Marianne looked a trifle startled. "There is much of interest in them, and no witchcraft," she said, and watched him turning over the leaves of the book.

"Aye, interesting," said Cyrano. "Nicetas mentions it in his life of Comnenus, and—"

She put out a hand and checked him. "There is something between the pages; what is it? A paper? A letter? Strangel!"

Cyrano carelessly removed the letter and she turned it over in her hand, with an air of puzzled wonder.

"Addressed to me—and I never knew it was there! Your pardon, *monsieur*."

She broke the seal, opened the letter, glanced swiftly through it. A little color came into her face, then she looked up and smiled.

"It is nothing. Pray be seated, *monsieur*; we shall have food and wine shortly. So you go on pilgrimage to the Mont?"

"Well," said Cyrano, when he had placed a chair for her and taken another himself, "I go on pilgrimage, of a sort." His gaze was whimsical, his dark eyes were laughing. "My real aim is less worthy. Look at the books there on the table; each book represents a man, you comprehend? A legacy to the world. Well, if Cyrano were to write a book, what then? Look you! These many months I've been studying with Gassendi in the College of Lisieux, and what's the end of it all, of these learned doctors and professors? Talk, talk, talk! A man can make no impression on the world by talking. Either he creates, or he vanishes utterly!"

"Why make an impression?" Marianne regarded him amusedly. "Vanity of vanities!"

"True, yet the urge is in us," said Cyrano soberly. "What good in talking, scribbling, philosophizing? A man has hands and brain. If he can combine them, whether in book or paint-

ing or what not, he leaves something in the world he found not there. Did you ever hear of Lady Tiphaine of Brittany?"

Marianne shook her head, watching the ardent, impulsive Cyrano with thoughtful gaze.

"She was wife to Bertrand du Guesclin," he went on. "While Bertrand was fighting the English, and was prisoner in Spain for five long years, Lady Tiphaine sat in her house atop Mont St. Michel and studied the stars, and wrote books about them. Her manuscripts are all in the library of the monks. Well, I go to see what she left to the world."

"What?" Marianne's eyes widened. "She studied the stars—and left manuscripts?"

"Aye, one of the monks told me," said Cyrano. "Does this interest you, who also study the stars? Well, well, go on pilgrimage, too! Simple enough. I'll have a coach at Palaiseau, and you shall share it with all my heart."

Marianne made no response to this. The old crone hobbled in, bearing a tray which she set on the table.

WHEN the wine was poured, the Lady of Gisy studied Cyrano, appraising him with her quiet eyes, those eyes so gravely kind, so wise, yet so filled with a girl's laughter. As they sipped the wine and sat in talk, Cyrano was aware that she was searching out the depths of him, weighing him in the balance of her mind. And he was aware of the subtle power that emanated from her, wakening his pulses.

So, abruptly, being a man of no tact and great impulse, he brought up the question of Sieur d'Effiat. In reply to his query, Marianne scrutinized him thoughtfully.

"What do I think of him? A strange question, *monsieur*. He is your friend."

"He is not," said Cyrano flatly. "I'd put sword into him with pleasure. He means you no good, let me tell you."

"Oh! I know that already," said she, and looked at him all smiling. Now he was confused, perceiving that there was a great deal this woman knew. "Cyrano—a singular name! And a singular device, if those stars are a device!" And she indicated the seven stars on his cloak.

"Ah, *mademoiselle*!" said Cyrano. "You, who study the stars, know not this device?"

"Not I, indeed."

"Why, look you!" With his long finger, Cyrano followed the design of those seven stars until he had connected them in lines. "They are my device indeed and my symbol, but more, they show the fate of all France, of this great kingdom! There is the word, *Caah* in the Hebrew," he went on swiftly, eagerly. "It signifies a man struck down, ill, without hope. Well, that is my own case! But look at the astrology of it, at the inner meaning read by Rabbi Chomer in that very book on the table there! The letter Aleph, in the center, is given numerically the number one, or one thousand; the first letter in this word is numbered twenty, the third, five. Thus we have one thousand and twenty-five years which this Realm of France will endure from its foundation. And granting it was founded in 768 A.D., then in the year 1793 the kingdom will fall—"

Marianne de Gisy broke into laughter so unassumed that it silenced Cyrano.

"My dear marquis, do you expect to live another hundred and fifty years to prove your astrology true? Surely you

place no faith in this sort of star-divination, in this superstitious mummary? Why do you indulge in such foolish nonsense?"

Cyrano grimaced, then broke into a frank laugh. "Oh, it is amusing at times," he said with his air of naïve gayety. "Besides, those stars stand for many other things, dear lady."

"Who are you?" she demanded, quietly persistent. "Come, tell me. From what part of France are you; where did you learn your wizardry?"

Sudden misery leaped into the dark eyes—misery so acute, so terrible, that the sight of it blanched the cheeks of Marianne.

"Dear lady," said Cyrano in a low voice, "ask me that question again, some day—but not to-day. Lie to you I cannot and will not, yet I would know you for a little day or two, be your friend if I might, help you if it lies in my power; I do not want to tell you the truth lest the cup of sweetness be taken from my lips."

"Very well," she said quietly. "At least you are a true magician, since your touch brings unguessed letters to light! But you have interested me with your mention of Dame Tiphaine. I study the stars in my own poor way, having a taste for it. If it be true that the wife of Bertrand du Guesclin left manuscripts—"

"True, indeed," broke in Cyrano. "The monks have a house in Paris, in Rue Etienne-des-Grecs, and I have talked with them at times. These Benedictines of St. Maur are historians and writers; they delve into old matters and ancient books. Yes, I assure you it is true."

"And you go to the Mont? I am indeed tempted," she returned thoughtfully. "However, I have the feeling that behind all this is something you

have not told me; some purpose you have left unsaid. Is it so, my dear marquise?"

FOR an instant Cyrano hesitated; then, as though her kindly, quiet eyes stripped away all defenses, he flung caution to the winds and burst forth in swift mad impulse.

"Yes, it is true. This rascal Effiat is behind it! Figure the thing for yourself, dear shining lady! He had certain intents, certain plans all laid. He told me of them. 'Nonsense!' I said. 'Leave the matter to me. If you desire this lady at the Mont, then I'll fetch her there to you! I will bring her.' I told him this to throw him off the track, dear lady. You will not go there, of course—oh, I had fine dreams about it! I thought I might escort you there, preserve you, lay down my life for you. Bah! All folly. Rank madness. Better for me to tell you the truth, thus, and then bid him to the devil if he asks why you did not come."

Her eyes, resting steadily upon his face, showed no astonishment at this disclosure.

"The truth is always better, my friend," she said softly. "I think that I may go with you to Mont St. Michel."

"Eh?" Cyrano opened his eyes wide. "But no—not at all! You misunderstand. I have told you the truth. Do not be tempted, dear lady, by my talk of manuscripts—oh, I am a fool, a bitter fool! Let us be sane. Sieur d'Effiat is lord of the Mont, a great noble, a powerful man. You would run risks with the rascal."

"I? You do not know me," and Marianne laughed softly. "I would run risks with most men, though I do not like this man Effiat. When balked, he would not be a man but a devil. Still, there is the old dispute over lands,

which might be settled. Then, the manuscript of Dame Tiphaine."

"Do not go," said Cyrano curtly. She eyed him for a moment.

"Perhaps I shall go," she said. "If so, then what?"

"Then you go against my advice and warning."

"What I do, I do of my own advice," said she, calmly. "Besides, you have promised Effiat to fetch me to the Mont."

"Bah! That is nothing," broke out Cyrano earnestly. "Now that I have met you, it is another thing entirely. You are more than I ever dreamed you could be. My promise to him meant nothing."

"I really think that I shall go," said Marianne de Gisy. "This Effiat has no real love for me; he does not know the meaning of the word. His pride is the only emotion involved. Because I refused him my favor, he is resolved to conquer me; like many of these court gentry, he considers a woman an inferior being. Perhaps he may learn a lesson! So, then; supposing I do go with you—would you be my friend?"

Cyrano read in her eyes that she would indeed go, that his protests were unheeded, that his warnings were less than the winds of heaven to her calmly poised spirit. So, being the man he was, he instantly swung over to the other extreme. If she would go, good! Why not? He warmed to the thought.

"Would I, indeed!" he exclaimed eagerly. "Excellent! It is settled! I am more than friend, dear lady—a very troubadour who would lay his devotion before you, who would gladly die in your service! Let us go adventuring, then. You, to run your risks, settle your dispute with the monks, get the manuscripts of Dame Tiphaine. I, to protect and watch over you."

Laughter shone in her eyes suddenly. "But," she said, flinging back his own words at him, "this Effiat is lord of the Mont, a great noble, a powerful man."

"Bah!" Cyrano twirled his mustache. "What is that to me? I am—Cyrano! And you are the daughter of the Sun. Such as we accept risks to gain our ends. You have lands and wisdom to gain; I, the honor of being near you for a little while. So—it is settled?"

"Not quite." She laughed a little at his eagerness. "Let us seek advice from the stars to-night, my dear marquis-astrologer! If the sky be not overcast, we shall see. And Pierre must be buried in the morning. May I send your lackey to seek the priest?"

SO it was arranged, and neither of them showed any surprise at this very surprising conversation. Marianne de Gisy had few contacts with the artificially polite world, and, like Cyrano, was a person who spoke with slight pretense or concealment. They had known each other a scant hour, and were at ease.

That night, however, Marianne sought no advice from star-calculations. Alone in her own chamber, she opened the letter so magically produced from the "Clavicule" of Solomon, and spread it in her candle-light. The writing was large, scrawled, filled with character. The words were singular in the extreme:

MADAME:

I stood in the street and saw you pass, a daughter of the Sun. And you will never know me.

Should I weep, should I write, should I die? Better to write; my ink-horn will supply more ink than mine eyes would furnish tears. Did I seek solace in death, it were vain; Paris is closer

to Gisy than is Gisy to the Elysian Fields! But what can I write you? Nothing, Goddess of the Flaming Hair—nothing and everything! Despair flows from my quill; you looked at me there in the street, and in your eyes I saw that were I of your world you would know me—but there are seven stars, and I have drowned them all.

Good! Let me serve you. Send me your commands; address your letters to the St. Jacques cemetery. Your messenger will always have news of me there. He may learn my lodging from the grave-digger or from my epitaph. He will there read that, as I had no hope of meeting and knowing you in this world, I have departed for the other—being well assured that you will come there. It may serve as some consolation that to guarantee you from the impertinence of the Devil, you will there find

this poor devil

YOUR SERVITOR.

Marianne lifted puzzled eyes.

"Strange words—yet a certain something glitters through them!" she

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Floating Islands

DURING exceptionally heavy rains or in spring floods "floating islands" are apt to be found on almost any of the lakes of Minnesota, Wisconsin or Michigan. They are tamarack bogs, some with small trees on them, some with only a few old stumps, and they are floated off from the shore of the lake by the rising water. They vary in size from an acre to a few square feet.

During the floods in central Wisconsin a few years ago, one such island, with a small fisherman's shanty on it, floated about the lake for days until the owner went out in his launch, tied a line to his shack and towed it back to shore. In another shallow lake filled with rushes and small open spaces of water, the dwellers about the lake wait anxiously in the spring for a floating island to appear. There is apt to be a race to see who gets there first, for the winner drives a peg into the bog and hauls the float off to some shallow spot, where he can beach it and thus lay the foundation for an island. A stone retaining wall and a few loads of dirt complete the island and it can then be sold for a cottage site. The cottage is set on a foundation of posts driven down through to the solid lake bottom.

Wyman Sidney Smith.

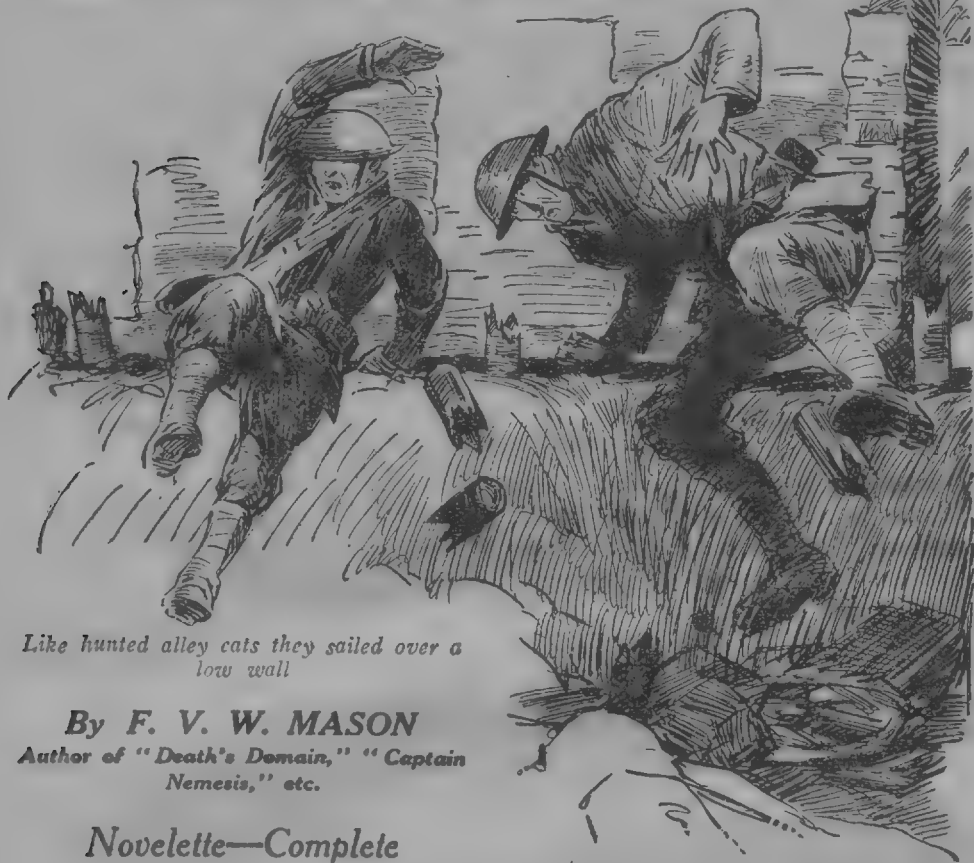
murmured. "Written by a madman, or by a genius. 'Seven stars, and I have drowned them all!' And he, down below, with his odd whimsical talk about seven stars—of course he put the letter there and uncovered it. Queer, impulsive man! What is his purpose behind all this nonsense? Why did he come here? Did he tell me the truth about Effiat, that cold, debauched, crafty creature?"

So she pondered the letter of Cyrano, and Cyrano himself, and the "adventure" to which he called her; yet she did not reread Effiat's letter, urging her to come to Mont St. Michel and adjust the land dispute, and introducing the Marquis de Bergerac. There was nothing in his letter to demand re-reading.

But for a third time she read the letter of Cyrano, and then stared into the candle-light, and her eyes were very sweetly thoughtful, and smiling.

The Goldfish Mutiny

An army, it is said, marches on its stomach; and the food problem made Jake Tourneur and his buddy turn France topsy-turvy



Like hunted alley cats they sailed over a low wall

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Death's Domain," "Captain Nemesis," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

A FINE MESS.

IT was about eleven o'clock of a drizzling and cheerless fall morning that Company D of the 333rd Machine Gun Battalion, with Brownings, carts, mules and all, trudged into the so-called rest billets at Beauville. The sodden khaki-clad column came to a halt as their captain was hailed by a red-faced, portly major who appeared to be the billeting officer for the village.

"Well, well, captain, not very spruce-looking, are you?" the major greeted in a bluff, jovial voice that grated on the ears of the footsore column. After two weeks of unrelieved duty in the lines, enduring a relentless hammering by the exceedingly well-directed German artillery, D Company was not feeling the least bit jovial or bluff.

"Well, well!" continued the major, as he shook hands with the hollow-eyed captain. "You boys certainly



look like you'd been to war. Big casualty list? Well, well, you'll come around

fine with the nice quarters and the fine hot food we're going to give you here."

The mud-covered, hollow-cheeked men brightened perceptibly at the mention of food. By the vagaries of the gods of war, D Company had completely lost contact with its ration base for the last three days of their sojourn in the trenches.

"Food!" they cried, licking their unshaven chops in anticipation. "Chow! Nice, thick, rest-area steaks—carrots, and French fries, all brown and hot! Baby boy!"

After the long and meager diet of corned willy and goldfish, alias corned beef and salmon, D Company was desperately glad of the prospect of a change.

"Man," grunted a lanky, red-haired Southerner, a corporal, shivering in the front rank, "if I ever lays eyes

on another hunk of goldfish, I'll go over the hill, so help me Hannah!"

"Steaks!" muttered the sodden ranks. "Sweet music, oh, lead me to 'em for a honest-to-God feed at last!"

"Yeh?" A bandy-legged private, whose flat cauliflower-eared face was dominated by a broken and flattened nose, looked up with swift suspicion, then spat resoundingly. "What wise guy slipped yuh de low-down we goin' to get steak 'stead of more o' Uncle Sam's 'favorite fruit?'"

The tall corporal who had first spoken said nothing, but shifted his pack and hunched the sodden slicker higher on his neck as he mechanically tilted his dripping helmet forward to rid it of chilly, transparent drops that formed persistently on its brim.

"Aw," said he, and swallowed with a jerk of his prominent Adam's apple, "they's mean men in this man's army, but they-all ain't got the heart to feed us no more monkey meat and sa'mon. We been fightin' the whole Kraut army

for two weeks, and we sholy rates a good feed. Say, boy, will you bend yore eyes over that?"

FOLLOWED by the voracious glances of the halted machine gunners, a white-aproned cook with hairy red arms skirted the edge of the road, a squawking chicken clutched firmly in his plump, chapped hand.

At the sound of the fowl's despairing swan song, the tall corporal wheeled sharply and his washed-out blue eyes followed the executioner from sight.

"Boy, howdy," he sighed; "there goes some cunnel's eats. Chicken!" There was a world of wistfulness in the lanky corporal's sigh.

"Yeh," observed the short ex-pug gloomily, "when youse gets to be a colonel, Jake, youse can rate chicken, too."

Ankle deep in a mixture of mud and richly pungent manure, Jake's platoon clumped down the street with sagging shoulders and stumbling feet. In passing, they gazed curiously at the ancient white-walled houses and sloping red-tiled roofs that loomed to either side through the drizzle.

"Well, boys," remarked the sergeant when the men had disposed of their sodden belongings about a drafty barn which, if one were to judge from its scurrilous chalked inscriptions, had sheltered many other units of the A. E. F., "I hear we're going to lean into a real feed. I heard the major slipping the info' to the C. O."

Blasphemous and sulphuric language greeted the announcement.

"It's damn well time," snarled one as he struggled out of his pack. "I could eat a horse and chase the driver."

Presently there was a pleasing clank and clatter of mess kits as the top sergeant's whistle shrilled in the street. Foremost in the line-up was Corporal Jake Tourneur and the short, broad-shouldered blond battler known as Tug Schmalz, their faces alight with hope and anticipation.

"Hey, soldier, where-at do we tie on the nose-bag?" Jake demanded of the sergeant.

"Last shack on the right, in the courtyard," snapped the sergeant with a malevolent snicker. "Hurry up, boys, or the minute steaks and artichokes will be gettin' cold and the *vol-au-vents* spoiled."

"Hi-yah!" shouted the corporal, and started down the street at a headlong run, with the other members of the platoon stringing out behind like a ravenous comet's tail. Jake covered the distance, slippery footing and all, in something under half a minute, and arrived at the low stone wall over which came the tantalizin' smell of frying meat and wood smoke.

"Baby," panted Jake, his slicker streamed out horizontally behind, "what I'm goin' to do to they steaks is a caution!"

He skidded round the corner and bolted through the gate, his aluminium oval shaped mess-kit already unfolded and his coffeecup handle secure. There before his gladdened eyes was the welcome outline of the chow gun, dimmed by saliva-inducing clouds of smoke and steam hovering and hanging low about it. Near by toiled the cooks and K. P.'s.

COME and gèt it, 'fore I trun it out!" bawled the cook, as though Jake and the hungry rest needed any encouragement! How welcome was the sight of broad khaki-

clad backs bending laboriously over pans that gave off clouds of succulent vapor.

"One side, guy! One side, or a leg off," gasped Jake, pushing his way through the K. P.'s clustered about the stove for warmth. Confidently he held out his mess-kit, a broad smile on his dirty, unshaven face.

Quite suddenly that smile vanished, never to return, as into the polished aluminium flopped a solitary golden-red chunk of bony salmon. Beside it a greasy K. P. forked a single slab of thick, fat pork. Dazedly incredulous, Jake stared, too outraged to speak, while a single mealy white potato splashed into the oily salmon sauce.

"All right, youse, dat's all; on your way," snapped the cook. "Whaddaya t'ink dis is, Delmonico's? On your way, bum, on your way."

Momentarily crushed by cruel disillusionment, the tall corporal allowed himself to be shouldered aside, while a consuming, blinding rage of bitter resentment was born in his brain, growing until he shook like an aspen. Nerves overtaut from the trenches grew dangerously evident, and his pale face worked spasmodically as about him rang the heartfelt curses of the others.

"Steak!" they snarled. "Of all the damn gyp deals they ever was!"

Then Corporal Jake Tourneur got going. He burst into such a stream of profanity as one may hear after years of search along the water fronts. From his lips fell a stream of withering, scorching invectives that omitted not a single person in the A. E. F. He delved into the rich, colorful vocabulary of the mule-skinner, of the bucko mate, and the longshoreman, until, with breathless and white fury, he towered over the thoroughly fright-

ened cook, his black eyes blazing and his lips twitching.

"Take this whole damned mess and stuff it up your shirt," he snarled. "I've had enough of it."

Loud grew the uproar, and a riot trembled on the edge of existence; then, from a near-by doorway emerged a spruce and natty lieutenant, his tiny little mustache trembling with agitation. Unerringly seeking out Jake as the source of the rebellion, he loftily elbowed his way through the crowd.

"What's this?" demanded the pink-cheeked one aggressively.

"Hawg wash, suh," grunted the tall corporal sullenly, thrusting a dirty forefinger at the repellent mess-kit of salmon. "And damn pore hawg wash at that!"

THE lieutenant turned a deep shade of crimson and snatched a mess-kit from one of the lowering doughboys who encircled the chow gun. He tasted the salmon sauce.

"I find this fish perfectly delicious," he stated coldly. "Here, eat that!" He thrust out the mess-kit at the tall Southerner.

"All right," snarled Jake, a species of madness seizing him, "if you like it so damn much, take it all!" So saying, he hurled the contents of his mess-kit in that smooth pink and white face, drenching the tremulous little mustache and the natty whipcord uniform.

A gasp of horror went up from the assembled machine-gunners as the unhappy lieutenant cursed and tried to claw the gluey, orange-hued mess from his eyes.

"I'll have you court-martialed! Arrest that man!" he shrilled. But Jake had, a moment before, spun on his heel, and, parting the crowd like a

snow plow, stalked out of the gate with Tug Schmalz trotting behind him. On the battered red face of the shorter man was a beatific expression of wonder.

"Gee, guy," he remarked, "I sure hearn some fancy cussin' in my life, but dey was Sunday School lessons compared to dat song youse sung." Hopeful that the corporal might begin again, the erstwhile prize fighter followed, his mess-kit yet filled with the sorry mess.

Then, as they reached the main village street once more, a private girl in a spotless white apron passed them, a covered dish in his hands.

"What you got there?" growled Jake savagely.

"Gwan, fry your fat face," was the retort of the messenger. "Whad-daya want to know for? You ain't gonna—"

Without a word Corporal Tourneur's red bony fist shot out and caught the orderly by the collar. With the other hand he raised the cover of the dish. There, cozily nestled on a carpet of French frieds, lay a roasted chicken with savory gravy eddying about it.

For a long moment the Southerner hesitated on the brink of violence; but from behind came the angry shouts of the lieutenant.

"Arrest that man!"

Down the street an M. P., scenting trouble, whirled about and pricked up his ears.

"Stop that man!"

"Beat it!" implored Tug, and pulled at Jake's sleeve. "Beat it, guy, or yuh'll break rocks at Leavenworth de rest o' yer life! You struck a officer; in wartime dat's a shootin' offense."

The M. P., now thoroughly aroused,

was running toward the two mutineers.

Jake reluctantly freed the terrified mess orderly and dived down a side street, to disappear in the dark tangle of woods behind the village. Behind them rose the cries of their pursuers.

"Now, you tore it high, wide and handsome," grunted Tug, when, breathless and with faces lashed in red wales by the moist twigs of the forest, the two paused in a little clearing. "You an' me is fixed for a fine go in stir, and no bondsmen handy."

"Listen to me, big boy," announced Jake with smoldering eyes. "Right now I'm goin' to tell you somethin'. Inside of fo'ty-eight hours I'm fixin' to sink these here molars in the best chicken dinner you ever hear of."

"G'wan," grunted Tug. "You're cockeyed. You ain't got no more chanst of eating chicken than I got of bein' next welterweight champeen. Bet you t'ree months' pay youse don't come near enough to chicken to slip it a fistful o' corn."

"O. K., big boy," grumbled Jake. "When Jake Tourneur craves chicken, he's sure fixin' to git it. Your mazu-ma's as good as lost, son."

His voice died away abruptly, for the underbrush was crackling dangerously near. Accordingly he listened a moment, then trotted off down a narrow path through the dark, dripping woods.

CHAPTER II.

HUNTED.

AT the end of a half hour's trudging among the glistening trunks of the trees, the two emerged from the shelter of the forest and beheld before them another little town as ex-

actively like the one they had quitted as two lumps of coal.

The corporal lifted his long, dark head and sniffed the wind eagerly, much in the manner of his own "houn' dawgs."

"Ah," he said, "they-all's throwin' some eats into the crowd down there. Maybe there'd be a chance of hornin' in on a real feed."

"Fergit it, guy," objected the other mournfully. "Don't fergit they's probably a phone from dat boig we was in over to dis one. Don't youse fergit we're A. W. O. L. now and fair meat fer the gat o' every ornery son-of-a-gun of a M. P. in this sector." The prize fighter peered about uneasily, his small blue eyes resting fearfully upon the village. "Looks nice and restful, but yuh can't tell. I ain't felt this way since I was ham 'n' egg'in' out in Chicago."

The lanky Southerner sniffed the breeze once more.

"Come on," he urged, "let's take a chance. I'm that hungry I could eat polecat an' like it. "So saying, he straightened his forage cap and marched boldly into the quagmire of a road that led to the little white-walled hamlet seen like a vision of hope through the drifting rain, mist and fog.

With a masterly assumed air of innocence, the two hungry outcasts tramped toward the loom of red-tiled roofs and low white-walled structures that made up the village. Tug swore furiously as, on the edge of town, a convoy of high-sided, camouflaged Mack trucks, loaded with elephant iron and barbed wire, went clanking by, splattering the sticky yellow mud of the roadway high into the air.

The begoggled driver of the leading truck, as he caught the blast of Pri-

vate Schmalz's profanity, leaned far out over the side and wagged a reproving finger.

"Bad boys," he said in a high falsetto, "does your mamma know you have run away from home? And taken to swearing?"

"If mah belly wahn't gratin' on mah backbone," shouted Jake furiously, "I'd aim to take a fall out o' that damned mechanic."

But they were even too weary to scrape off the new accumulation of mud, and disconsolately tramped into the village street, casting hungry glances to the right and left. Everything betokened the occupancy of American troops—O. D. painted motorcycles, camionettes, and scrawled notices in English.

"Hey, *soldat*," inquired Jake of a private who crouched out of the rain in a doorway, wielding a busy toothpick, "where-at does they-all deal the eats in this dump? Me and the big boy heah is on our way to ketch up to our outfit at Beauville. We ain't been eatin' much lately, and I reckon we'd like to get a mouthful afore we-all goes on."

"Grub pile is over, Johnny Reb," grunted the doughboy, twiddling the toothpick and eying the strangers suspiciously. "Maybe the food butcher's got a few scraps left lying around."

"Whadja have for chow?" inquired Tug hopefully. "Was it a real feed?"

"Sure," replied the private, with a sigh as he extracted a shred of meat, eyed it, then ate it. "We got a A-1 mess sergeant. They's only thirty of us parkin' in this burg, and believe it or not, that guy rounded up enough chicken—"

"Chicken!" Jake's long jaw dropped at the word.

"Yeh," continued the private, and

waved the toothpick amiably. "You c'n call me a liar if you want, but we had chicken all right. They was kinda sophisticated and old, but man alive, they sure tasted like a million bucks after all the salt horse and dunderfunk we've been feeding on. If you fellers hurry up," he suggested, "they might be a wing or two left."

HIS eyes widened in amazement as the two mud-splashed strangers fairly sailed down the village street, heading with unerring instinct toward the house from which came that heaven-sent aroma.

"Hey, youse guys," shouted a sergeant of M. P.s. "What do you bums think this is, a race course?" He jumped aside just in time to avoid being hurled to the ground by Jake's maddened rush.

"Boy," panted the Southerner over his shoulder, "did you hear that? Chicken! You ain't got no chance for your money now."

With hope beating high in his heart, Jake pushed through the stragglers of the meal. As he passed he glanced at the mess-kits, and waved a triumphant hand to call Tug's attention.

There was no mistaking the shape of those slender, delicate bones that rested in the aluminium containers. The repast had undoubtedly been chicken.

"What do you guys want?" A very fat cook looked up in a belligerent fashion.

"Have a heart, buddy," pleaded the corporal, his mouth watering as he beheld the indubitable evidence that a chicken dinner had been distributed. "We-all ain't had nothing to eat for a week, so help me Hannah! We-all done got left behind when our outfit come out of the lines."

"What outfit was dat?" inquired a burly, unshaven sergeant with a suspicious glare. "Youse guys look more to me like a couple of A. W. O. L.'s."

"D Company, 333rd Machine Gun," snapped Jake, and exhibited tarnished collar ornaments in substantiation.

"That's right," volunteered a figure from a dark corner; "that outfit went through here early this morning. They're on the level, Hank."

Tug gave a realistic sigh of relief. "Give us anyt'ing youse got," he pleaded. "Salt horse, goldfish, or anyt'ing. I ain't been so hungry since I was ridin' the rods."

"You guys do look kinda tuckered out and white around the gills," admitted the jovial cook, "and since you seem to be regular fellers, I'll—"

Corporal Jake stood trembling on the brink of ecstasy, and his whole hungry being seemed filled with a gracious flood of thanksgiving when the fat man behind the stove continued:

"I'll fry you up a hunk of chicken apiece. Just park your dogs out of the way over there."

The soldiers were heaving themselves up one by one, and with sympathetic words to the waiting pair, made their way, uttering sulphuric curses, out into the persistent, soul-killing drizzle.

With borrowed mess kits in their hands, the two adventurers waited like cats about a fish cart, scarcely able to credit their senses. The whole smelly room spun about Jake's head like an immense top.

"A. E. F., where are you?" was Tug's continual remark. "Gee, dis just can't be de After End First! Don't nobody snap his fingers and wake me up."

In a delighted daze the two sodden,

hollow-cheeked scarecrows watched the stout performer drop two heavy half chickens in the sizzling fat on the stove. It hissed and spluttered bravely, playing the sweetest of gastronomic melodies in Jake's ears.

"In two shakes of a lamb's tail you guys can sink your molars in the best slab of chicken this side of Paris." The cook shuffled across the kitchen and produced a handful of cold fried potatoes. These he dumped into the pan with the chicken.

EVERY hiss and crackle of that fat was like a symphony in Jake's large red ears. With the gaze of a man who sees his soul's salvation before him, he feasted his eyes upon that piece of chicken now turning a golden brown. Around the knife and fork his muddled, chapped fingers opened and closed spasmodically, and a continual fountain of water formed in his mouth. At last the cook turned the chicken over for the last time and indicated the pile of French fried potatoes which lay steaming to one side.

"All right, youse guys," he said, "come and get it, and eat hearty. Don't they feed you up in the lines? How's it like up there?"

Transfixed with joy, the two arose, but from the doorway came a loud, startled cry.

"Hey, Mose, pipe the United States Marines policing up—I wonder who those M. P.'s are after."

"Look out," cried another, "they're coming here. You should have married that girl, I tell you."

M. P.'s! The tall corporal stood frozen in his tracks, an agonizing doubt in his mind.

"Beat it," hissed Tug, "the coppers is after us. Beat it, if you don't want to make little ones outa big ones from

here to Leavenworth! That damn looney's sicked the Publicity Boys on us!"

The cook, instantly alarmed at the prospect of having sheltered—and comforted, as the phrase goes—two possible criminals, caught up a cleaver and with warning cries mounted guard over the stove. Behind him hissed and crackled the frying chicken, so near and yet so infinitely far.

But even as the lanky Southerner weighed his chances against the cook, there came a loud clatter of hob-nails and the sound of imperious voices at the door but a few feet away.

"Where are they?" panted a harsh voice. "They went in here?"

"In there."

Then with a vision of court-martial and subsequent unpleasant proceedings rising dreadfully before his eyes, Jake turned and with a farewell look at the stove leaped through the back door with Tug but a stride behind.

"There they go! Stop them!"

Like alley cats pursued by terriers the fugitives fairly sailed over a low wall that inclosed the backyard, though the top was studded with broken bottles.

"Halt!" There was no mistaking the menacing tone of that shouted command, and Jake ducked frantically as an automatic pistol uttered its dry staccato bark. Just an inch or so over his head whined a hungry bullet.

"Stop! Stop!"

Before the howling M. P.'s could fire another shot, the fugitives dropped to temporary shelter behind the mud-splashed wall. Tug at that moment rose valiantly to the emergency, a different person. His coarsened features took on a look of furtive cunning and without an instant's hesitation, he turned down a little alley.

"Foller me," he snapped. "I know how to duck coppers."

JAKE ran as hard as he could, but could not resist stealing a glance over his shoulder.

There were two red-faced M. P.'s just astride the wall, their red brassards showing up strongly as they raised their pistols for another shot. *Snap! Crack! Zo-e-e-e!* the bullets went keening by.

"Deserters!" bawled the pursuers at the top of their lungs. "A. W. O. L.'s. Murderers! Stop 'em! Everybody out! Get 'em dead or alive."

From all sides of that previously serene village rose startled shouts. Figures in blue, khaki, and black poured out of every house, gripping varied weapons, apparently determined to cut off the retreat of the bewildered chicken hunters. The fierceness of this pursuit worried the pair; that looey must have raised a terrible row. Perhaps it was a very serious military offense to spill salmon over a lieutenant.

Jake turned paler and paler as the blood cry swelled loud. Tug evidently knew what he was doing, for with incredible speed he vaulted another wall and darted into a house, scattering startled peasants right and left.

A hair-raising scream arose as the foremost of the fugitives trod squarely on the family cat. The women of the household drowned out the unhappy feline's wails in a united shriek of terror.

Jake hesitated in a dark passage, momentarily lost, bewildered in the gloom and by the ear-splitting screams of the peasant women. Then ahead he descried a door open and the chunky figure of Tug dashing out across the farther street. A doughboy evidently billeted with the family foolishly tried

to cut off the harassed corporal's retreat.

"One side!" grunted the fugitive. "Ah aim to go places and do things." His large, horny fist shot out and with the impetus of his stride behind it caught the ambitious doughboy a terrific blow on the side of the face that sent him staggering and rolling among the rows of copper pots and pans behind. It was a gorgeous uproar.

Jake was running at top speed now and breath was coming with difficulty into his chest. Furthermore, the flapping slicker cut down his best speed. Behind he could hear the shouts of the hue and cry. Once more on the glistening cobbles of the village street, Jake hurdled a steaming manure pile and a sleeping pig or two and followed the fleeting form of the ex-boxer into the shelter of the woods again. It fortunately had a thick growth of all manner of friendly underbrush, but the pursuit was stern and unrelenting with almost the entire population of the village taking part. Twigs cracked and branches snapped ominously on all sides of the two lost sheep from D. Company.

"Dem low-lifes is goin' to put de collar on us after all," panted Tug, his battered features sweating and scarlet with his exertions. "Sounds like dey want to lynch us. All dat fer one hunk o' goldfish!"

"No, suh, they ain't goin' to get me till Ah has my chicken dinner," snarled the corporal with something of a fanatic's fire in his eyes. "When Ah want chicken, big boy, Ah want it terrible bad."

"Yeh," gasped the private, "and youse don't like losin' three months' pay neither—if you don't owe it all in stoppages."

The wet twigs lashed their faces like

tiny whips and their slickers caught and tore in the underbrush as they bolted onward. Then, quite suddenly, to Jake's profane dismay, they once more beheld the familiar outlines of the red village roofs through the trees before them. His heart stopped dead.

"Gee!" gasped Tug, "we've run in a circle. What the hell we goin' to do? The bulls'll be here in a minute. Think fast, you big bum, you got me into dis."

FOR a moment the breathless, hopeless runners paused—but only for a moment. Behind rose the crashing progress of their pursuers who, realizing that the fugitives were unconsciously returning toward the village, had redoubled their efforts.

"Look!" said the Southerner. "There's a dugout of some kind—no, a ruined cellar. 'Tain't much, but it's our best bet."

Amid a tangle of shrubbery the wild-eyed fugitives could barely distinguish the outline of a low door. It was not a ruin, but a vegetable cellar, almost invisibly built into a rise of the earth. With the silence of Indians on the war path, the two crept on hands and knees into the cold, damp darkness and there crouched fearfully, while the dough-boys brandishing Springfields, M. P.'s with ugly, black-snouted automatics, gangling peasant lads with manure forks and scythes tore by—all bellowing for the blood of the hunted. They seemed disconcertingly confident that at any moment they might find their quarry.

Jake placed his mouth close to his companion's leatherlike ear, deformed by years of leather-pushing into a hideous cauliflower. "Gone by," he whispered. "Maybe we'll get out with a hull skin."

"What I don't t'ink of youse and yer damn chickens!" replied Tug with feeling. "What for was I sap enough to come wit' youse anyhow?"

"I didn't invite you, what I remember," grunted Jake gloomily, "but you can't go back now. That looney I decorated with the Order of the Golden Fish will sho'-nuff send us up the rocky road till hell freezes three foot thick. If you was to show up in Beauville now, you would be welcome like a skunk in a church lawn party. You'd better traipse along with Uncle Jake and have a nice second joint when—" there was a note of steel in the corporal's voice—"when I get that chicken. And so help me Hannah I'm sho' fixin' to have it afore noon to-morrey if I have to murder every cunnel in this Gawd-forgot sector."

For some time longer the two lay on their bellies breathlessly listening to the baffled coming and going of the irate and evidently murderously inclined M. P.'s.

"I cain't understand," objected the Southerner, "why them sailors' May Poles should get so blamed steamed up over a pore little no-'count mess-kit o' salmon."

As if in answer to his query, two of the marine M. P.'s halted just outside the door. Jake could see their thick putteed legs on a level with his eyes.

"They was hard eggs," observed one of the policemen. "The A. M. P. from Roosty told us to shoot 'em on sight. They're the guys that did the murders over at Malincourt. These birds fit the description O. K. One big, ugly black-haired cuss looks like a Missouri mule what's been kicked—and the other short, sportin' a phiz only a mother could love. Cauliflower ear, too."

The other M. P. shifted his weight and cursed as a trickle of water dripped

from his glistening helmet down the neck of his uniform.

"Yeh, Donovan was tellin' me there's a big reward for 'em dead or alive. They can't get away—Captain Gohagan's got a dragnet out for those bozos—and believe me, kid, I ain't takin' no chances; when I sees 'em, I fire first and ask questions at the post mortem. Remember it's dead or alive—I likes 'em dead." He laughed coarsely and looked about.

TUG shivered and Jake drew a deep, quivering breath. So that was how the land lay! At last the two police tramped off, unconsciously leaving a pair of thoroughly alarmed machine gunners behind.

"Can yuh tie a tag to that?" groaned Tug, his battered face working. "Seems to me we stands about the same chance Frank Moran had against Willard." He stiffened spasmodically as he felt Jake's hand close upon his arm. "What is it? Are dey comin' back?" he breathed in swift dismay.

"Look!" There was a quivering note in the Southern corporal's voice. "Look! A hen yard!"

There indeed was a little chicken house and a run some fifty yards away on the extreme edge of the village. Watching the feeding hens sat a little dirty-faced, barefoot girl. But the interest of Private Tug Schmalz was not in chickens any longer. Before his fearful sunken eyes rose a vision of Tug Schmalz stretched cold and dead on his face with an M. P.'s bullet in his back.

"We're goin' to git it," he murmured, "and git it right."

"Bet yo' life, big boy," agreed Jake dreamily. "The one I aims to get is that big black one with the white tail feathers."

"White tail feathers hell!" Tug relapsed into disgusted silence.

The cheerless afternoon rolled on toward cold twilight. The rain finally abated and a sickly yellow sunset tinted the white plaster walls of the farm-houses. Then to Jake's acute dismay an elderly Frenchman in a patched and soiled blue smock came out and with the help of the child noisily herded the hens toward the village. One belated straggler suddenly appeared from the little hen house and careered along after the others with its neck outstretched and its wings spread as though it could read the bitter thoughts of the tall black-headed man who crouched despondently among the dusty cobwebs of the vegetable cellar.

"Dere goes de only supper we're like to eat," said Tug with a bitter laugh. "Why in hell is a Frog chicken one o' de family and livin' at home? Now we're like to get our pants shot off wit'out no excuse."

STONY-FACED, Jake stared off into the misty night. He felt very old and tired and he was very hungry. Tantalizingly the lights of the village houses came to him. There was food and warmth and shelter from the biting north wind that had begun to moan through the tree tops.

"Come on, big boy," he said when Tug dropped to the ground beside him, "we can't go into that burg—we'll just have to find another."

Like fantastic garlands, streamers of roast chickens danced before his eyes, turning, turning—juicy breast, plump legs and all. Like luscious will-o'-the-wisps they glowed among the steadily dripping trees and ever the sighing of the wind bore a marked resemblance to the satisfied, sleepy clucking of chickens.

"Going goofy, I guess," he told himself. "And chicken is the only cure!"

CHAPTER III.

VILLAGE OF MYSTERY.

ONCE they nearly were captured, for as they strode down the sticky clay road whither they knew not, a quartette of mounted M. P.'s appeared suddenly from the night, and reined in, slickers flapping about their wet and chilled knees.

"Halt!" they cried, but with the speed of weasels vanishing in a hedge, the two wanderers plunged into the shelter of a clump of willows. Fortunately the M. P.'s did not pursue the exhausted machine gunners and contented themselves by firing three or four random shots in the general direction of the fugitives. It was evidently too dark to risk riding off the road and to go hunting men known to be desperate murderers.

For some time the M. P.'s halted, talking loudly among themselves as to the probable whereabouts of the men.

"Never mind," said the corporal in charge. "We'll get 'em in the daylight. Rabbits couldn't get through the line we got strung in this sector."

Braving arrest and possible shots, the two nearly exhausted doughboys pressed on and knocked at the door of a farmhouse that stood alone.

Presently, a gray, wizened little woman lifted her face to the window and, in answer to Tug's tragic pantomime of starvation, beckoned them in. Of French, Jake had a Louisiana knowledge, reinforced with a wine-shop vocabulary; of English the feeble old creature had picked up a most amazing collection of blasphemous and profane remarks.

"I feex you buzzard-born bum's *café* queek—weel ze big stiff make one fire like hell?"

Jake stared in amazement at the white-haired little woman who, with a benign expression on her wrinkled features, chatted on, at times venting expressions that made his hair stand on end and Tug's eyes widen in admiration.

That she was bone poor they could see with half an eye. Her nightgown, though clean, was so patched that the original fabric was almost lost. With just a shade of hesitation she opened the cupboard and took out the one half loaf of bread that was left. And to Jake's amazement from the lower cupboard out stepped a huge black Minorca hen. Which, sublimely disregarding fate, strutted to the center of the floor and flapped her glossy wings, much as a man does on rising.

Jake gathered himself for a spring and Tug reached for a butcher knife, but the little old woman not noticing their menacing gestures, stepped forward and patted the chicken on the head.

"Permit, *messieurs*," she chuckled, "zat I present Juliette, ze best damn cheeken in France."

JAKE subsided as she hustled forward with the hen cuddled in her arms, crooning over it and smoothing it with endearments.

"Ah, *messieurs*, Juliette, she is so clevoir. Shake 'an's wiz ze beeg *monsieur*, Juliette."

Irony, O irony! The black hen swaggered forward upon command and obediently raised one yellow foot, cocking an insolent eye at the Southerner who, with watering mouth, struggled to restrain a maddening impulse to pounce upon that educated fowl and

bear her off into the night. Tug's face was a study as he gently laid down the butcher knife and uttered a gusty sigh.

"'Ere," she invited, "feed your damn faces," and from beneath a stone in the floor she drew forth—miracle unsurpassed—a tiny crock of butter. Juliette cackled inquiringly and cocked a bright black eye at Jake.

Jake's eyes gleamed and as the aroma of coffee grew strong in the air, he sighed, for half a meal is ever better than none. Then as the old woman pushed forward the loaf and Tug commenced to hack off a generous half, Jake raised a protesting hand.

"Easy on the whip, big boy," he murmured, "it's a hired hoss. I reckon this's about all the chow the old gal's got." Juliette advanced and commenced pecking about at the crumbs while Jake breathed hard and crammed his hands in his pockets.

Swiftly contrite, Tug cut off an infinitesimally small piece, and although the little old woman urged him to take more, Private Schmalz shook his close-cropped, bullet-shaped head.

"Naw, t'anks just de same," he said. "We had supper at de Ritz. Dis is just an after-theyater snack, old gal."

No one knew more than Jake what an effort it must have cost the little fighter to say those words. Neither of them had eaten in almost forty hours, and Jake's hollow eyes gleamed like a winter wolf's as Juliette, petulantly ruffling her glossy black feathers, came stalking across to him.

The little old woman hopped about the bare drafty room much like a busy sparrow, the tail of her old-fashioned night cap fluttering down her bent and twisted back.

"Snap outa eet," she urged. "Feed one dam' hell of a lot. Ah, Juliette, *tais-tôi!*" Like a mother feebly reprov-

ing a mischievous child, she scurried forward as the chicken, with suicidal carelessness, fluttered up to perch on Jake's khaki-clad knee. "*Méchante,*" she scolded, "unless you are good the *Americaines* can have you to eat!"

"Thanks, sister," drawled Jake, desperately fighting the impulse. "I expect we got enough and I don't like chicken much anyhow." Rising, he fumbled in his pockets, though he knew there were no francs there. The utter bareness and destitution of that poor little house struck to his heart; then his fingers encountered a locket he had won in a crap game during the week preceding. It was gold, or at least, it was heavy and its owner had sworn it to be fourteen-karat. A tooth mark on the back betrayed Jake's suspicions.

When the old woman saw his gesture, she raised a shrill cry of protest. "*Non! Pas de tout,*" she cried. "No! I haff wan great big bum son—I 'ope," she added. "I 'ave not 'eard from heem een half a year."

THE clatter of hoof beats on the not distant road aroused the wanderers to activity. Quickly, they caught up their damp helmets and, uttering heartfelt thanks, slipped out, though not before Jake contrived to slip the glittering locket and its chain beneath the cracked and clumsy coffee cup from which he had drunk. Fixing a last, lingering look at Juliette comfortably squatting by the stove, he shut the door.

Considerably refreshed, the two skirted the near-by village and trudged determinedly along. Then, when a single Packard truck came rumbling by, they hailed it.

"Give us a lift to de next boig," pleaded Tug. "My feet is wore t'rough to de knees."

The slickered chauffeur nodded unenthusiastically and applied the brakes, slowing the big camion with a suddenness which made its flapping canvas top belly forward. Expertly, the two wayfarers swung up onto the driver's broad seat and, tilting their helmets forward against the rain which had recommenced, hunched up for warmth; going wherever the truck went, but hoping thus to pass the cordon of M. P.'s on the alert for the murderers they unfortunately resembled with such uncanny accuracy.

The truck jolted and splashed steadily toward the front, an occasional yellow-rimmed shell hole appeared, and apparently aimless tangles of rusty barbed wire, which stretched away over the black undulating hills to either side of the road. At last, as dawn grew bright in the eastern sky, the driver jolted into a village, and Jake nudged his drowsy companion.

"Pipe that soldier in the funny gray uniform? What's he?"

"I dunno, and don't give a damn—Frog white wings, maybe," grunted Tug, and dropped off to sleep once more, his helmeted head swaying and jolting drunkenly with the motion of the truck.

A cautious questioning of the driver elicited no further information, and Jake was forced to content himself with eying the strange troops curiously. There were so many Allied soldiers in various uniforms scattered about France, that it seemed hopeless to discover of which nationality were these undersized brown-faced men.

As they rattled through the village square with a triumphant salvo of back-firing, an M. P., squelching forlornly back and forth along his post, suspiciously eyed the three figures on the front seat of the truck. He started to

step into the center of the road, but the rain evidently trickled down his red bull neck, for he abandoned the attempt with a jerk of his hand, indicating that the truck might pass.

"By golly," murmured Schmalz drowsily and only the tip of his nose was visible, "may I drown in manure if I ever want to see another M. P. again. Did yuh lamp de ten-ton look dat guy slipped us?"

Jake settled comfortably on the seat and prepared for a nap. "Well," he said, "after we-all clears this burg, we won't see no more M. P.'s for awhile—you can bet y'r boots on that."

BUT when they reached the farther edge of that village which swarmed with the strange troops, the chauffeur morosely pulled over to the slime on the side of the road and jammed the brakes into a heart-stilling skid.

"Aw right!" he bellowed through a slit into the back of the truck, "get out, youse guys, this is Vourdonville."

"Why, what the—" Jake stiffened in terror and opened his eyes to the limit as he observed, with a gasp of horror, that from the back of their truck had emerged not one, but a full platoon of M. P.'s, each red-faced, unshaved and sleepy—each wearing a businesslike automatic belted on the outside of his slicker, each with a fatal red brassard on his arm, each with a nasty, calculating look in his eye. With his blood suddenly converted into a glacial current, Jake remained frozen to his seat, while the M. P.'s, grumbling and cursing at the inclement weather, fell in along the edge of the road.

"All right, youse guys, you too! Get off," grunted the driver to Jake and his companion. "Dis ain't no hotel."

"Just a second," pleaded the distracted corporal. "Just let us ride with you back through town—our road's on the other side, after-all."

The red-faced driver regarded him with a sudden suspicion in his wind-reddened eyes. "I don't go no farther," he announced. "Youse guys gotta get off now. What's the matter wit' you, anyhow?"

Schmalz, aroused by the voices, had opened his eyes and was looking with an expression of grotesque horror upon the swarms of M. P.'s, evidently surrounding the truck on all sides. Instinctively his hands shot skyward, and unluckily attracted the attention of the huge M. P. sergeant.

"Put 'em down, you fool," hissed Jake. "They ain't wise yet."

Tug, still half asleep, obeyed, but the attention of the policemen was now fully fixed upon him and his companion.

"Hey, youse guys," called the M. P. sergeant ominously, "come over here—I want to talk to you." The Southerner's heart turned to cold, cold iron—it was the M. P. sergeant from the first town they had visited.

Jake saw the light of recognition in the sergeant's eyes, saw his hand dropping to the holstered automatic.

Jake did not hesitate. Shamming the parabola of a skyrocket, he leaped from his seat to the far side of the truck and sprinted madly for the shelter of the close-set houses. Instantly a fierce hue and cry was raised and some twenty-odd Military Police, each with a loaded automatic in his hand, dashed in mad pursuit.

"It's the murderers!" they called to each other.

"Get 'em! Get 'em dead or alive!"

"Shoot 'em before they shoot you!"

Then pistols began to crack spitefully

just as Jake with Tug at his heels plunged blindly into a doorway, through a hall into a damp rancid-smelling kitchen, and so across a narrow street on into the next house.

"Surround the village!" bellowed an M. P. sergeant who very evidently knew his business. "Surround it and they can't get out!"

TREMBLING and weak with the lack of food, Jake lifted a haunted face to peep out of a cellar window of the house in which he and Tug had taken refuge. Instantly he recognized that what the policeman shouted was tragically true.

Vourdonville lay perched on the summit of a small bare hill, like a kitten asleep on a watermelon. Everywhere the bare ground sloped away in dismal nakedness on all sides, in such a manner a dog could not hope to leave the village undetected.

"Hell!" panted Tug, his pale blue eyes hard with despair. "I'm finished wit' dis, Jake. I'm goin' out an' surrender and get it over wit'."

Whereupon Jake pointed out the indubitable fact that such a move would probably end in his being shot the instant he appeared, for the M. P.'s were obviously taking no chances whatsoever.

Through the village streets they could hear the ominous tramp of the American searching parties, and Jake thanked his lucky stars that the occupants of the village—except for the M. P.'s—were those strange soldiers in the blue-gray uniforms, else with their overwhelming numbers the fugitives must have been discovered at once.

Systematically, the M. P. searching party, with pistols held ready in their fists, surrounded each farmhouse and searched it thoroughly. There was a

grim alertness that spoke of cocked pistols and fingers ready on the trigger.

"We're cooked," groaned Tug. "Dere's only four houses left."

Jake knew this was but too true, and with a wild glare of an animal which sees the trap closing upon it, he eyed the cellar. There was a staircase leading up into the interior of the house.

"Come on," he said hopelessly, his lanky figure bent double as he set foot on the stair. "A cellar ain't no place to die." So saying, he led the way gingerly up the stairs as from near at hand came the strident protests of the strange soldiery while the M. P.'s ruthlessly hunted and searched every room in the second house away.

Evidently the turmoil in the street had attracted the attention of the soldiers who must have occupied the kitchen; but unfortunately, there was no meal handy. A number of spotted and greasy gray-blue uniform coats dangled from nails ruthlessly driven into the plaster of the walls. Other strange-looking pieces of equipment were shiftlessly strewn about, and a torn sheet of a newspaper printed in some language Jake could not read lay dirtied and soiled on the floor.

Breathlessly the fugitives tiptoed into the next room, and through the door caught sight of the occupants of the house, standing in a noisily excited group about the front door, watching with interest the progress of the M. P.'s toward their own particular house.

That the residence in which he found himself was better furnished than the average peasant home, the astute Southerner quickly realized. Oriental rugs were still down on the once polished hardwood floor, and comfortable, upholstered chairs stood about. Then, in a near-by closet, the fugitives saw what they sought.

"Gosh almighty!" Jake's eyes bulged as he swung open the closet door and there beheld a uniform—the most gorgeous he had ever seen—liberally laced with silver and sprinkled with multicolored campaign buttons, at least three rows of them. An officer's cap and cloak dangled alongside, together with a pair of slack trousers and suspenders.

AT the sight of these glittering garments a new hope was born, and with it an urgent desire to live, on the part of Corporal Tourneur. Tug was no less acute, and in the twinkling of an eye the two deftly filched a uniform apiece from the closet and, laden with the spoils of their raid, passed again through the kitchen.

As their hobnailed feet scraped softly on the dirtied tiles of the floor, Jake paused, for there, lying unguarded in a pan, was a plump, pink-and-white chicken, evidently prepared as a noon-day meal for the owners of these gorgeous uniforms. With the determined stride of a born go-getter, Jake marched across the floor and, emitting a grunt of satisfaction, snatched that chicken from its bed among the onions and potatoes.

Tug was horrified. "Here, you big stiff, leave dat egg factory be. How 're youse goin' to carry it? Generals don't—"

"Don't worry, guy," broke in Jake. "Ah'd manage it if she was bigger'n the gold eagle on the pilot house o' Joe Fry's tugboat."

Clutching the cold chicken corpse in an enormous right hand, Jake led the way into a back room of the house, wisely avoiding the cellar. Softly they closed the door, and in a chamber that appeared to be an office of some sort the two Americans commenced shed-

ding clothes like acrobats in a tight rope stunt. Then their hands fairly flew over the various hooks and catches of the new garments which, by amazing good luck, fitted sufficiently well not to be ludicrous.

"Talk about vaudeville changes," panted Tug as he fastened the high, tight collar of his uniform. "I guess we made dis in two minutes flat."

They did not attempt to remove the time-consuming roller puttees, but merely pulled the red-striped slack gray trousers over the muddied khaki.

"Them damned Marines is in the next house," panted Jake as he crammed the visored cap on his black head. "Will you listen to 'em? Wonder what in hell kind of uniform this is?"

"Got me," replied Tug and his battered face turned purple as he hooked his collar. "What you goin' to do wid dat chicken?"

Jake's roving eyes lit upon a black brief case of ample proportions, and with the speed of one whose life and liberty depend upon what he does, he crammed the plump fowl between the strips of leather.

A moment later two officers, high ranking if one were to judge by the amount of silver braid which ornamented their collars and shoulders, pulled their capes tightly about them as they stepped out into the chilling drizzle of the morning.

"Wish we-all had a shave," murmured Jake from the side of his mouth. "Suthing tells me a colonel don't go around with no three-da' whiskers."

"Ever see de Mexican army?" countered Tug, and brushed an imaginary speck from his silver-embroidered sleeve. "Don't worry, guy, we'll get by."

Quite boldly they issued from the

yard of the house into a sort of alley which they crossed; then they marched down the length of it, striding along in their best boulevard manner. Here and there the blue-gray soldiers saluted them with a curious jerky salute which in no wise resembled that of the American army.

PRESENTLY and with no little trepidation, they approached two of their erstwhile pursuers, who stood squarely and aggressively in the center of the street with drawn pistols, vigilantly scrutinizing every one that passed. As the two gorgeous figures drew near, the M. P.'s stiffened and saluted with a precise, concerted motion. Tug, swathed in the gray-blue cloak and with the cap's visor all but concealing his broken nose, nearly lost the day with an ill-timed snicker, but Jake's sharp elbow shot out in time, and in a moment the impostors had swaggered safely by.

In the Southerner's mind was one burning question: where and how soon could he build a fire and cook that chicken? Its weight was a pleasurable drag on his arm, all of five pounds he estimated, and again the fountains started in his mouth.

The wanderers had gained comparative safety at the edge of the village when a terrific hubbub like the cheering of a distant football crowd swelled from down the alley they had so recently quitted.

"Ah," smiled Jake, "they've found that chicken gone, the greasy burns!"

But his smile faded; an even louder, almost thunderous outcry rose to the drizzling heavens, denoting the fact that the occupants of the house had discovered the theft of certain uniforms.

"Now we *are* in one hell of a fine mess," was Tug's uneasy comment, for

the village fairly boiled with bewildered hurried comings and goings of the gray troops. "We've got two armies down on us—the U. S. A., and the who-knows-what?"

Presently, the outcry took a definite turn and the turn was unmistakably toward the two gorgeous figures standing undecided by the muddy roadside. Through the sifting rain Jake could distinguish a pursuit forming headed by a number of M. P.'s who, trotting forward very quickly, were followed by a large, noisy mob of the strange soldiers.

"Reckon we-all is cooked dis time," sighed the Southerner, and regretfully weighed the brief case once more. "Reckon you collects that bet after all, Big Boy. They ain't no cover for miles."

"When dis free-fer-all is over I won't be collectin' no bets from nobody," groaned the shorter man while the wind viciously whipped the gray-blue cloak about his thick-muddied legs.

The hands of Death seemed about to close upon the luckless pair, when from the far side of the village, a gray staff car dashed in view amid a cloud of flying mud and spray; a large, luxurious limousine, of the type manufactured by Messrs. Rolls-Royce & Company, it sped forward with imperious blasts of its siren straight at the forlorn figures by the wayside.

Then inspiration seized Jake. He beckoned imperiously, desperately.

To his complete amazement, the glittering equipage obediently skidded to an abrupt stop. The chauffeur snapped a salute and the private beside him, also in the mysterious gray-blue uniform, sprang out to open the door.

As the mahogany-faced footman wrenched open the door, he muttered some apologetic and quite unintelligible

phrase to which, in an agony of apprehension, Jake merely nodded, terrified at the possibility of being recognized. What should he say?

But apparently the chauffeur had instructions, for as soon as the door banged shut, the Rolls-Royce gathered speed and, ignoring the frantic shouts of the mob, turned down a road branching away from the village, going at a reckless pace.

CHAPTER IV.

MASQUERADE.

"PLUMB lucky," was Jake's verdict, when Vourdonville and its menace vanished around a bend in the road. Uttering a blissful sigh, he sank back in the soft velvet upholstery. "May I be double and triple damned if this sure don't top the stiffest yarn to nothin'."

Tug, with an elaborate gesture intended to indicate affluence, leaned forward and selected a big, oily-looking cigar from a little case conveniently fastened to the front. "Deah, deah, I must bounce dat chauffeur—dese ain't Coronas!" he lisped while the car sped on, dashing at headlong speed over the pitted, uneven road, a little green and red flag, fixed between the headlights, whipping bravely through the rain and mist.

The shock absorbers did their duty and the two Americans rode as on eiderdown cushions, childishly delighted at the strange good luck that had befallen them.

The road wound down the valley and across a range of hills, skirting a plodding American column with an imperious tooting of its horn.

"Home, James, and do not spare the horses," quoth Tug loftily. "Deah

me, Mr. Tourneur, who are dese bums hogging de road?"

With exaggerated tilting of his mashed nose, the one-time prize fighter viewed the drenched and shivering column, headed by an officer no less wet and uncomfortable. The exquisite humor of the situation was penetrating Jake's vitals, too, and he continued to glance out of the window with a supercilious grin carefully arranged on his unshaved face. Then suddenly, he sank back.

"Moses in the foothills," he gasped. "Old D Company's goin' back in!" He would have got out then and there but for the sight of the lieutenant whom he had decorated with the Order of the Golden Salmon, striding at the head of the column. There was a nasty look on his pink-and-white face, and Jake with a sickly grin recognized traces of salmon yet staining the lieutenant's uniform.

In a moment the gray Rolls-Royce hurtled by, flashing grandly down the roadway in a welter of mud, heading on to its unknown destination.

"Ah sure wish we had a idea where we-all was goin'," grumbled Jake.

"Ah, whadda you care? Ain't this ritzy enough? I suppose youse wants a bath now." The ugly, flattened face of Private Schmalz was wreathed in a beatific smile as he luxuriatingly expelled the rich, soothing smoke of his perfecto. "We c'n always chuck some kinda bluff, if there ain't no other guys dressed like this around."

"Ah reckon, but Ah hate to see old D Company goin' into the lines without us. Ah'm wonderin' why they took 'em back in again so soon? We-all will be labeled 'over the hill' fer fair. Did you see the low pressure look on the looey's face? He'd have shot us fer breakfast."

Presently, the Rolls-Royce drew up with another staff car and fell in behind it. It was English. Then a mud-splashed Pierce Arrow with two stars on the windshield fell in line, giving the road a slightly funereal aspect. Steadily from side roads other staff cars joined the procession, all of them bearing either the stars of generals or the stripes of the various Allied headquarters.

"Wot the hell?" asked Tug in growing alarm. "Is this a damned general's picnic or a funeral?"

"Don't worry, Big Boy," reassured the Southerner, his eyes bright beneath the silver braided cap, as he patted the bulging brief case held between his knees. "We-all will find a chance to pad the hoof when this parade slows down. Then you and me is goin' to take this here chicken out and reduce it to a state what makes these here rooined cathedrals look like a new bank building."

EVER thicker grew the stream of glittering cars. There were Renaults, Cadillacs, Siddelys, Peugeotts, Rolls-Royces, Pierce Arrows. In a steady column they sped on through the rain and mist towards their unknown goal.

"If I was only wised up to what we was supposed to be, I'd feel better," remarked Tug as he threw away the frayed end of his cigar and filled his pockets with the remainder. "I can spill a little Yiddish I picked up on de East Side. Mebbe we could get away wid dat until we makes our crawl."

"Don't worry," was Jake's reassuring refrain. "We-all can get out of this in no time at all, and get back to join the old company in time for the rumpus. They can't call us 'over the hill' then."

Presently the flying column of staff cars commenced to slow down, and Tug, peering out of the rain-lashed windows, beheld not far ahead what had once been a magnificent château. Its lawn was rutted and pitted by the wheels of countless staff cars, the trees had been girdled with yellow by the teeth of countless hungry cavalry mounts, and a series of deep fan-like scars in its limestone façade betrayed the fact that some time since the war began, it had been subjected to bombardment.

An acute sinking sensation gripped the Southerner's being as their Rolls-Royce passed a brace of red, white and blue sentry boxes and whirled up the drive to a halt before the door. As they waited for their turn to alight, a much beribboned English general with curling mustaches alighted and fixed a glassy, disapproving eye upon the blue-gray car.

"G-g-golly," Jake," stammered Tug when the Rolls-Royce halted at the doorway, "I can't go t'rough wit' dis— dey'll find us out sure."

But Jake, with an assurance he was far from feeling, hitched himself forward when the gray-blue footman ran around and flung open the door, saluting sharply at the same time. Coldly the Briton watched the maneuver.

Never had Corporal Tourneur's feet seemed so big; true, the "borrowed" blue trousers with their broad red stripe did to a certain extent conceal the heavy, muddied brogans of the U. S. army, but the hobnails clattered loudly when Jake alighted and several officers standing in the doorway looked sharply at the unshaven, obviously unwashed figure that came clanking up the stairs.

"God, Mannering," sniffed the immaculate Englishman, "you *would*

think those beastly Portuguese could get cleaned up for an occasion like this." But he saluted none the less when Jake, risking all in a desperate gamble, came swaggering grandly up the staircase, bowing and saluting in all directions, his broad red hand yet clutching the black brief case and its precious chicken. A step behind came Tug, his battered features pale as a dirty sheet and only by an extreme effort of the will able to salute and walk. As through a fog Jake beheld a gray-haired French officer come forward and salute deferentially, then to his complete terror he realized there were no less than four silver stars on that extended cuff! He was actually shaking hands with a full general. At the thought he almost fainted. What was he supposed to say? He gagged helplessly but was spared by a little French sergeant who threw back his head and announced loudly:

"Son Excellence Général de Brigade Valbuena da Sylvestre, de l'Armée de la République Portugaise!"

THE impostor's head spun dizzily. Great Scott, here he was, a mere corporal posing as a brigadier-general! His heart thudding over his hobnails, he vainly tried to recall the long garbled name which apparently belonged to him. Sweat broke out on his brow and an acute trembling seized him. The Frenchman was eying him coldly, evidently expecting him to speak. Behind him he could hear Tug's teeth rattling like distant machine gun fire.

"*Plaisir*—" he managed to gasp in his Louisiana French. "How's the wife and—" He halted, scarlet to the roots of his unkempt hair. Always polite, the Frenchman smothered an exclamation and attempted to engage

Jake in conversation to which Jake made a valiant attempt to reply in that curious French *patois* of lower Louisiana.

The fine old man's eyes gradually widened; obviously the French general had never heard anything like it. Nevertheless, like a true diplomat, he mastered his emotions and once more extended his hand. Jake glanced at his own fist and saw upon it geologic deposits from the last three weeks of war darkly encrusting the surface. Sweating with apprehension, he desperately wiped the offending hand on the seat of his trousers and from the assembled officers, a wonderful murmur arose.

"Don't these Portuguese ever wash?" demanded a grizzled American colonel of his neighbor. "You wouldn't find Americans of any rank—not even a private—as dirty as that odd looking general there."

"Very odd," murmured the Englishman, to whom he had spoken, "they're all gun-shy of soap; but this blighter evidently doesn't believe in shaving either—looks like a regular bandit mountaineer; not to speak of his aide."

Poor Tug, completely overwhelmed and bewildered by the mass of uniforms surrounding him, crowded helplessly close to Jake, his red, bony wrists projecting far beyond his silver-laced cuffs and his small, bloodshot eyes blinking nervously to and fro like those of a cat suddenly exposed to a strong light.

With ready tact the French general, beholding the embarrassment of his guest, drew the pseudo Portuguese to one side and leveled a barrage of technical questions at Jake's bewildered head.

"How many have you now in your splendid brigade, *mon général*?"

Jake swallowed, looked wildly about, then hazarded a guess. "About forty thousand—"

"What?" The Frenchman's eyes flew wide open. "Forty thousand men to one brigade?"

The desperate Southerner felt his only chance lay in sticking to his story, however preposterous. "Yes," he replied in *patois*, "me and General Avocado" (it was the first name that came to his mind) "brought up a coupla more regiments the other day. Let me see—was it Wednesday? No, 'twas Friday—I says to him, I says, 'Louis, we ain't got enough men,' and he says—"

Steadily Jake was edging toward the door, his mind fixed on escape, the brief case still clutched in his hand; then a portly, red-faced American colonel drew majestically alongside like a dreadnaught coming to anchor, and vigorously began to shake hands with the Portuguese commander.

"Well, well, glad to meet you, general," he began. "I suppose you have had about enough of the war by this time?"

"You said a mouthful," was Jake's astonishing rejoinder. "Ah'll say Ah have!" He checked himself suddenly.

THE American officer jumped 'as though a bee had stung him.

"What did you say?" he demanded and his eyes smoldered.

"Why, general—colonel, Ah mean, suh—" Jake stuttered helplessly, with the colonel's eyes boring into his soul like chill blue gimlets. He felt himself really lost this time, but the Frenchman again came to his rescue.

"I beg of you, Colonel Cree, you must excuse General da Sylvestre—our gallant ally has but a faulty knowledge of English. Colloquial, is it not?"

"Um," agreed the American in manifest suspicion, and his eyes never left Jake's face. "What he's got is very colloquial—I wonder just where he picked up that cracker accent."

Ominously soon Colonel Cree disengaged himself and made his way across the floor to become the center of a covertly whispering group. Jake's unshaven face flamed a guilty scarlet as, perceptibly, he could feel a general suspicion taking shape; then the door of another room was flung open, revealing a long table set with spotless napery and delicate glassware from the château's supply.

Never had Jake seen such an array of wine glasses. He stared in ludicrous astonishment. There, big, little and medium-sized glasses, they stood in orderly company fronts, only outdone in number by the bewildering array of glittering forks and spoons. In the center of the long table an enormous vase sprouted the national colors of the Allies in a riot of design and hues. It was all very impressive and expensive, done in the best Gallic manner.

"Gee, Jake," whispered Tug in an awed voice, "dey musta set out all de tools fer t'ree meals to once."

"Shall we sit down, gentlemen?" suggested the French general. "We can discuss our preliminary problems at the table, so please bring your notes and data with you."

As the gorgeous assemblage moved to the dining room Jake made a desperate effort to escape through a side door, but when he opened it he beheld the broad, blue-clad back of a French sentry standing very erect and with bayonet fixed. Silently the impostor shut the door, and, like a prisoner who turns his face to the firing squad, returned to join the mass of officers seating themselves about the table.

In the depths of Corporal Jake's monumental misery, there was one consoling thought that shone like a blessed, comforting beacon on a stormy shore: before he died he would partake of a meal of the very best. Clutching the brief case in an iron grasp, he allowed himself to be ushered to the table, where, over his high collar with its silver-embroidered oak leaves, his Adam's apple trembled visibly—it simply would not stay still; the sight of that luscious, delicate food steaming ready on the sideboard was too much.

At the end of a brief pause a mess orderly put a plate of soup before him. Without hesitation Jake, at random, selected the biggest spoon he could find, hunched his glittering shoulders forward and proceeded to do yeoman labor with the purée. Tug followed his example with orchestral accompaniments—crescendo—that aroused the company to acute speculation as to what table manners, if any, existed in sunny Portugal.

Long before the rest of the company had been served, the plates of the two officers in gray-blue were as destitute as a Belgian's cupboard. Venting a gusty sigh of satisfaction, Tug straightened up and deftly wiped his mouth on the glittering cuff of his uniform. Eyebrows were lifted even higher.

"Quit it, you gas-house bum!" was Jake's fierce *sotto voce* warning. "You ain't in no beanery now. Try to act like you was brought up some place except behind swingin' doors."

DURING the early stages of the meal the officers at the head of the table held forth at length, while orderlies in the horizon blue of France moved varied colored pins

backward and forward on a great map that covered the wall. Of what was said Jake understood not a word.

Now and then one of the Allied officers spoke up, gravely making a suggestion or asking a question. Meanwhile the two "Portuguese" hunched over the food like starving sailors and proceeded to devour each and every morsel within a long arm's reach. Wine, too, they drank—long, cool draughts. Gradually the loom of disaster retreated before their eyes.

Jake even began to feel nonchalant and gay until he discovered Tug in the act of stealing an olive from his neighbor's plate. He breathed dire threats unless the ex-pug desisted. Fruit, soup, and fish they had, all prepared with that delicate skill which none but a true-born Frenchman has.

"And, general," a white-haired Italian general bowed deferentially to Jake, "what is your conviction?"

"Seventh Day Adventist," replied Jake unblushingly. "My mother was a Baptist, though." Fortunately his French was so horrible that probably not two men understood the nature of his reply.

"And yours?"

"Ninety days," mumbled Tug in English, his mouth full.

The Italian stared a moment; then, recovering himself, said: "Of course—of course." He resumed his discussion without further addressing the Portuguese.

Presently the fish course was cleared away and a number of large white plates bearing a golden baronial crest were placed before the guests.

Jake looked hopefully in the direction of the kitchen and beheld—oh, joy of joys!—one of the mess orderlies in the act of bearing in a huge plate of roast chicken! The disastrous fate

which hung heavy over his head seemed to pale to insignificance. It was the day of the dog!

He glanced in mocking triumph at Tug and made motions of counting money with his fingers. But, to his intense disappointment, the mess orderlies began serving the aromatic, delicious brown broilers from the opposite side this time; possibly seeking to thwart the greedy Portuguese.

As though mesmerized, Jake's black, brooding eyes followed the snail-like progress of the chicken around the table and he bitterly cursed under his breath when the last portion was served and the white-aproned orderly returned to the kitchen for a fresh supply.

The aristocratic old general who served as presiding officer arose, bowed and, turning to the bald-headed Englishman sitting to Jake's right, bowed again and said in exact English:

"Monsieur le Colonel Armstrong-Sidney, will you be good enough to give us your valued opinion regarding the transportation situation in area B 10?"

The English officer pushed aside his plate, hemmed, cleared his throat, and bowed, then reached downward and picked up the brief case which lay at his feet. This he placed before him on the table as he rose to his feet.

"I have the honor to report, sir," he began and worked with the catch of the brief case, "that the roads in the vicinity of Hadrionville and Mouquarton are passable for infantry, tanks, and field artillery, but cannot be relied on to support ammunition trains and heavy guns. I have here notes prepared after an exhaustive investigation of conditions—extremely complete notes, if I may say so."

He smiled modestly as he opened

the brief case and thrust his hand into it.

ALL the grave, intent faces at the table were turned toward him in anticipation of the report, and so instantly noted the expression of shocked surprise that seized the speaker's features. There arose a concerted gasp of astonishment as they watched him draw from the depths of the brief case the plump naked body of a chicken dressed as it is when prepared for cooking.

"'Pon my word," gasped the Englishman in horror. "What's this?"

"A chicken, it seems," dryly observed the presiding officer. "But hardly in—"

Flushing a deep shade of magenta, the speaker glanced to the floor. "Er—" he apologized, "in error I seem to have got the brief case of our distinguished Portuguese colleague."

Jake froze in terror and his scalp prickled unbearably, but nevertheless conscious that at his elbow stood the mess orderly in the act of placing a luscious half chicken on his plate.

"Why—er—Ah reckon it's a old custom in our army," he stammered in a vain fight for time; he must get a bite of his portion or die in the attempt. "In Portuguese we-all don't go about 'thout some food. Kinda handy—er—you-all can't never tell, general, when—when there's a war on—"

His hands on the table crept forward to touch that tempting piece of chicken. Then from the far end of the hall came a furious, high-pitched clamor preluding the arrival of two enraged dark-faced officers in gray-blue uniforms.

Instantly, the American colonel read the situation aright and whirled on the impostors.

"Guards," he thundered, "arrest those men!"

"*Arrêtez ces misérables!*" echoed the Frenchman, his face growing purple with wrath and humiliation. "They have insulted France!"

In a trice, stalwart guards streamed in from every doorway, bayonets fixed as though to repel an attack in force.

"Ah, ze robbers, ze villains!" stormed the new arrivals. "Zey have stolen ze uniform of General da Sylvestre! Stolen ze auto! Zey have him disgraced—ze peegs! Let zem be hunged at once!"

The Portuguese brigadier was frothing at the mouth and fairly beside himself with wrath, and could barely be restrained when Jake and Tug were hustled by, hands in the air and with needlelike bayonet points pricking the small of their backs.

"Pleese hang zem at once!" pleaded the Portuguese with rolling eyes and fluttering hands. "Ah, ze brigands! My illustrious country have been disgraced. Ze assassins have stole my cheeken—zere eet ees! You will hang zem, no?" he demanded of the senior American, a large officer wearing the twin stars of a major general.

"I assure you, general, these men will be court-martialed at the first opportunity," promised that worthy, his face a deep sunset red. "You may rely upon it, my dear general, that these rascals will suffer. If they are deserters they will certainly be executed!"

The general's words sounded a knell of hope in the ears of the two prisoners who, overwhelmed by this last catastrophe, made no effort to escape. Very sadly Jake reflected that they were technically deserters in the face of the enemy—and ever the vision of a firing squad grew unpleasantly more realistic and more imminent.

As they quitted that glittering saloon, Jake's head turned back for one last glance at the half chicken lying untasted on his plate, and knew his cup of sorrow was full to overflowing; verily, death had no further sting.

CHAPTER V.

PRISONERS.

IT seemed that the château offered no place suitable for the temporary imprisonment of the impostors except in the wine cellar. In that damp, musty cave they were flung, with strident curses and promises of annihilation if a single bottle were touched. Stripped of their gaudy uniforms, they lay shivering in the utter darkness, once more but two weary, discouraged, chickenless machine gunners.

For several hours they drowsed in the darkness, too crushed to talk; then Jake spoke:

"Tug, just think: Ah had that chicken on the plate before me."

"Ah, to hell wit' youse and yer chicken!" snarled Tug from the darkness. "Just try and figure out a way of beatin' a pine kimona. Didn' you get what dat general said? Execution! Dey're goin' to slip us de woiks fer fair."

Jake made no answer and silence fell again, during which the squeak and rustle of rats and the sound of many feet tramping back and forth overhead were the only sounds.

The two soldiers slept.

They were awakened by a crash and a rumbling thunder not unlike the noise of coal falling down a long chute, and the whole château rocked; then suddenly a feeble glimmer appeared at the far end of the cellar. Overhead could be heard hoarse, frightened

shouts and hurried commands. Feet scurried madly to and fro, and here and there voices cried out in acute pain:

"*Au secours! Help!*"

"Gee!" murmured Tug, "the Krauts must be makin' a raid."

Jake's eyes were fixed in calculation upon that ray of light which had fortuitously come upon them.

"Come on, Big Boy," he whispered, "let's see if we-all can't get to hell outa this. We can only get kilt tryin'."

Hurried investigation proved that a thin section of brick wall separating the wine cellar from the rest of the house had collapsed from the force of that explosion, whatever its cause. Fortunately, the hole was large enough to permit the passage of a man's body, and, caked with dust and mortar, the two prisoners found themselves crouching in a tenantless passage. It evidently served as quarters for the château's guards, for a number of cots were arranged along either side and the walls were thickly hung with equipment of all sorts.

In an instant, Jake had struggled into a trailing blue overcoat and a blue helmet. He snatched a long-barreled Lebel rifle and an ammunition belt with cartridge pouches, bayonet and canteen from the nearest nail. Tug followed his example, and, in scarcely more than three minutes after the explosion, they cautiously made their way out into the late afternoon sunshine of the château's courtyard.

Everywhere raced distracted figures in blue, bearing armfuls of paper, for the building was dangerously afire. Jake joined an intrushing squad, snatched up an armful of documents, and, mingling with the workers, gradually worked outwards toward the road.

That an air raid had just taken place they quickly discovered, for high overhead amid the thinning rain clouds were two squadrons of planes locked in a death struggle.

JAKE and Tug wasted no time gazing upon the picturesque struggle. They trotted on toward the road, buckling on equipment as they went. Evidently an attack of considerable importance was in preparation, for the road up which they had come in such regal style was now choked with muddy blue camions of the French army, loaded to capacity with tragic-eyed infantry. How tired they looked going up for yet another struggle after three long years of it!

The occupants stared in amazement when Jake hailed them and pleaded for a ride to the front. Wondering, they aided the wanderers aboard.

Toward twilight the trucks groaned to a halt in the lee of a bare, blasted ridge with shell holes spotting its sides like gigantic pock-marks, and Jake realized that the vicinity had undergone a terrific bombardment not very long before.

Great yellow gashes showed up brightly in the sides of stark, leafless trees and blood-stained bandages were everywhere in gruesome tangles. Craters of fresh raw earth yawned all along the rutted road down which a stream of mud-plastered French wounded came limping back, silent and numbed with pain. On the far side of the hills artillery rumbled and grumbled ceaselessly, interspersed with staccato bursts of more distant machine gunfire.

"Some mean row we're buttin' into," muttered Tug as he leaped down from the camion. "Wonder where in hell our outfit is?"

"Well, Big Boy, Ah reckon you win," bitterly admitted Jake. "'Pears like we-all ain't a goin' to have no chicken after all. Might as well try to find D Company and die that way as bein' stood up against a wall and bein' bumped off for deserters."

Pursuing a course roughly parallel to the front, they pushed northward, cut across steady streams of advancing French troops. Dead men, mostly French, began to appear in the underbrush; then a caisson with its pile of gleaming empty shell cases. Here was a dressing station roughly arranged in the shelter of a gully, and strewn about with bloody, grimy bandages.

Every one seemed too occupied to pay attention to the two infantrymen who, with their long blue overcoats hiding their O.D., pushed boldly on.

"We're gettin' closer," exclaimed Tug as a shell screamed by high overhead, and burst with a dull detonation down the valley.

"Yeh," agreed Jake, "Ah reckon the lines is on top o' this here range o' hills."

By dusk they began to encounter an occasional American, evidently part of the liaison personnel, while ever louder sounded the growling batteries until at last they could distinguish the distinctive rattle of machine guns. The wounded increased in number, most of them unbandaged or with roughly contrived first aid. Presently a swarthy French corporal with an immense black beard passed by, carried by two pale-faced German prisoners, his right leg hanging in bloody shreds.

"*Alors, mes amis,*" he called. "Go get yourself a chair like this! There are plenty on the other side of this hill."

"*Bien sûr,*" hailed Jake, and shuddered at the other's cheerfulness.

Just as sunset tinted the hilltops, a haggard Colonial lieutenant came up, shouted a command at Jake, and at the same time pointed vigorously over a rise in the ground. Without waiting to see whether the wanderers obeyed, he hurried on, for over his khaki-clad left shoulder poured a steady stream of red.

SHOULDERING his Lebel, Jake, followed by Tug, stumbled wearily off in the direction indicated by the wounded officer.

"What we goin' to do?" demanded the ex-pugilist; but he saw quickly enough, for as they gained the summit of the rise he beheld a huge herd of prisoners so thinly guarded that, had the Germans desired to escape, they could have done so very easily.

The handful of guards greeted them and assigned the wanderers to watch a group of some forty prisoners. The Germans regarded their new guards curiously from round, unemotional, vacant-looking eyes, and Jake regarded them. The prisoners were all ages, and conditions, half of them wearing the deep, hod-shaped trench helmet of the Central Powers, some bareheaded, and some with round, bun-shaped caps.

"Lot of grand-daddies among 'em," observed Jake. "They ought to be back home sittin' on the front porch with their feet up, 'stead of playing soldier."

"Lamp de school kids, too."

The low ebb of the German manpower was written with graphic clearness before the eyes of the two Americans.

"Don't look as though they had nothin' to eat for years," remarked Tug.

"Ve haffn't," came a harsh voice from among the prisoners.

Jake and Tug stared.

"Who spoke English in there?" demanded the Southerner.

A tall, scrawny *korporal* with eyeglasses secured by string loops behind his ears shambled forward, a fawning smile on his cadaverous face.

"Where did you learn English?" demanded Jake suspiciously.

"I vass a vaiter in the Hofbrau Haus in Milwaukee before this *verdamm*t var began."

"You don't get no chow now like you did in them days, does you?"

Emphatically the *korporal* shook his blond, close-cropped head. "No," he admitted, "ve haf nothing had but one-half *kilo* of horse meat effer veek since two year."

"But the officers?"

An angry murmur broke out among the huddled Germans.

"Ja! ja! die *offizieren* haf enough."

"What do they get?"

The corporal scowled and pulled his field-gray uniform overcoat tighter about him, for the night wind was becoming bitter. "Oh, for officers, it different iss—beef they get, plenty horse flesh—and chicken."

"Chicken?" chorused the two Americans. "Did you say chicken?"

"Yes."

"Nowadays?"

"Yes!" replied the prisoner, and his lean, bearded jaws worked hungrily. "This very morning our *Hauptmann* chicken for the officers' mess ordered."

Slowly Jake heaved his long body forward; then crooked an imperious forefinger at the wondering prisoner. "All right, you—come along!"

Leaving Tug to stand guard over the dejected, sheep-like mass of prisoners, the corporal led his prisoner to one side, and there by adroit and diligent questioning—as thorough as any

intelligence officer could have directed—learned a number of extremely interesting facts concerning the German positions.

"Ja," nodded the eyeglassed German. "The 107th Pomeranians on the hill are. A strong point. It command the valley."

SQUATTING on his clay-smeared heels and manipulating a twig as a pointer, the prisoner bent over a crude map, the bright-red band on his bun-shaped cap showing up strongly in the twilight.

"Oh, is that all?" sneered Jake, very purposefully. "When us Americans goes to take a little hole like that, it won't be no strong point no more."

The German straightened up with a contemptuous laugh. "Oh," he said, "so you *verdammt Amerikaners* last week thought. You haff but to look into that valley now. Your dead there by the hundrets lie. You are so foolish," he grinned contemptuously. "Old soldiers would know better. Why do they try to storm machine-gun nests?"

"How could I tell this perticklar strong point when I sees it?"

The German grinned and revealed a mouthful of yellow snaggle teeth. "Very easily. First, there is vun big rock above; dot rock like a sleeping bear looks. '*Der schlafende Bär*,' ve call it. For three years we haff fortified it. It imbrengnable iss."

"Tough little spot, eh?"

"Ja, der hill enfiladed iss by machine guns—every meter of it. Three lines of barbed wire encircling it, and from de drenches to either side our veterans mow down such beobles foolish enough near to come. Allied bones three deep in der ravine at der bottom lie." The German uttered a chuckle of ghastly satisfaction. "Ve vere com-

fortable dere; if *der Hauptmann* hadn't me out sent, I might berhabs a ving of chicken haf gotten from the leavings of the officers' mess."

In the semi-darkness a grim smile lit Jake's angular features. A few more questions enabled him to orient himself thoroughly, and with a smile of immense satisfaction he marched the ex-waiter back to the herd of prisoners.

"Too bad you didn't stick to your job in Milwaukee," he remarked. "Then you'd have been on the top side."

The German laughed raucously. "Vait until you feel the machine-gun bullets about you vispering."

"Go on, Kraut, beat it," snarled Jake.

From the direction of the road came the tramp of a column of French infantry who, with long bayonets fastened on their rifles, came up on the double-quick to assist in guarding the prisoners.

"On our way, Tug," was the Southerner's warning. "We-all will have to throw our feet some, if we fix to get there afore it's too late."

So saying, he halted in the lee of some underbrush and regretfully stripped off the protective blue overcoat. His hand shook as he strapped the ammunition pouches over his shirt, for the night had grown very cold. He and Tug still clung to the blue helmet of France, but otherwise they were once more American machine gunners moving up to the front.

MIDNIGHT found them wearily pushing their way through a sweating, cursing mass of commingled French and American troops, halted temporarily amid the flame-scarred ruins of a freshly-bombarded

village. In the confusion the wanderers were able to salvage a couple of American helmets, and heaving a sigh of relief dropped the last of their disguises in the débris-littered ditch.

"Troops for Courby," bawled a hot and irascible M. P., "takes the road to the right out of this dump. Hey, you, in the Quad truck! Dammit, slow down! Do yuh t'ink this is a boulevard? Troops for Courby—"

"Courby!" Jake's heart leaped at the word. "Courby!" The name sounded familiar. Why, it was the town below and to the right of the strong point of the Sleeping Bear!

Groping in the darkness, he linked his arm through Tug's and successfully mingled with a cursing detachment of Signal Corps men who, laden with telephone instruments, coils of wire, and wiring tools, commenced to move off at the command of their officer. Black, distorted shapes in the half light, the Signal Corps detachment started off down the road, grunting at the unsteady footing and profanely speculating among themselves as to the nature of the job ahead.

Skillfully merging with the shadows, Jake and Tug stumbled along a few steps behind, glad to have guidance through the baffling, ruined streets; endlessly slipping and skidding on the muddy, rutted road, while overhead a few feeble stars appeared.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEAR'S JAWS.

"NOT a bad idee of yourn." Tug, flat to the ground, wriggled forward a few inches. "We'd never have got up to de front lines except by luggin' dem cases. Gee, soldier, my back is damn near busted, though."

Jake nodded in the dim light. "Ah wonder if anybody saw us skinnin' out of the trench."

"Naw, I don't t'ink so."

- "Well, come on then." The South-erner's heart was commencing to beat furiously. With the experience of a man who had already been in the lines, he recognized the unmistakable signs of a general advance and an attack in force. For no other reason would the roads of the reserve area be so swarming with troops; for no other reason would the supply and the ordnance trains struggle up so near the snarling cannon. In his mind's eye he saw again the mass of anxious, shivering dough-boys waiting in the support trenches for the coming of dawn.

Against the clear, starlit sky Jake could at last descry that outline he had so feverishly sought. Black rocks above, tumbled one on the other in some geologic upheaval, did give a present striking resemblance to an enormous bear stretched out flat. Somewhere beneath that pile of stone lay his goal. The thought set the chilled blood leaping in his veins.

"How many bombs did you sneak outta that there case?" he whispered.

"Eight or nine—and you?"

"About the same. I reckon that's enough."

"It oughtta be. Gee, guy, it's quiet here. Youse wouldn't t'ink dat dere's goin' to be merry hell break loose in another two hours."

Indeed, the stillness was uncanny. It was three o'clock, that hour when the vitality of men runs lowest, that hour when all nature sleeps its deepest.

The tangled wire of the American front line now lay some twenty yards behind, and the ground took a distinct upward pitch as they resumed their progress on hands and knees.

Onward wriggled the two, coated with mud from the terribly churned-up ground, and drenched to the skin with water from the shell holes. Again and again they skinned and cut their hands on scattered, jagged shell fragments and rusty strands of wire.

Once in a while a star shell shot up, bathing the whole valley in an eerie blue-white light, and, on one occasion, when Tug unwisely flattened after the flare sprang into being, an invisible machine gun railed petulantly a moment to spatter the two prostrate Americans with mud.

"You damn fool!" growled Jake. "Ain't you learned yet to freeze when them lights go on?"

"Yeah, but—I was on my hands and knees," protested the other.

"That makes no difference. Men get killed that way. Don't never move; at night, them Jerries can't tell whether you was a stiff hung up on a hunk of wire or not."

Upwards they toiled, past bloated, swollen bodies that gave off an incredibly sickening stench, past tremendous shell holes filled with gas and water—a fluid that would burn the skin off any man who plunged his hand into it. Upwards, always on toward the Sleeping Bear on the summit.

THEY encountered the first of the German wire. It was nasty wire, thickly set with cruel, long spikes fully an inch and a half long. Drawing from their former experiences, the two Americans turned on their backs, and pulling out the nippers that they had previously appropriated, commenced to inch their way through, easing the parting strands as much as they could.

In spite of their precaution, it now and then parted with a loud-sounding

tang! that sent shivers of apprehension over the two. Sweating and trembling, they lay at last on the far side of the first barrier.

"Listen, guy," gasped Tug, "we'll never get t'rough—dis is soocide." He sucked his fingers, cut and lacerated by the wire.

"Might as well die this way," was Jake's rejoinder. "We-all dassent go back to the outfit. We-all ain't got no papers and then there's that general out gunnin' fer us, and when a general hunts somebody, I reckon he's got more eyes than a centipede has laigs."

"Yeh, dat's so. You sure youse got de dope right about dem officers' quarters? I'd hate like hell to swarm in de right church but de wrong pew."

All went well until they reached the far edge of the innermost wired fence. There an invisible finger of steel caught on the seat of Tug's trousers and ripped the stout fabric with a loud, snarling sound that would have awakened General Grant.

Instantly the two cowered motionless as a star shell promptly shot up and rifles began to crack on all sides. There came a low moan from Tug.

"Jake," he breathed. "I—got one t'rough de shoulder."

For some moments the indiscriminate firing kept up, with the Germans shooting furiously at every fancied outline. Dozens of bullets smacked into the clay, scant inches from where Jake lay cold with apprehension. Finally, after endless ages of suspense, the uproar died away.

Fully an hour and a half or two hours had been consumed in that painstaking, snail-like progress up the hill of *der schlafende Bär*. Jake wondered how long it would be before the barrage began. As he and the wounded ex-boxer crouched in a newly-made

shell hole a few yards outside the German first line, he could hear the sound of guttural voices and the tramping of many feet.

He opened his mouth to speak, when, roaring like the war-cry of Mars himself, the first shells of the Allied preparatory barrage began to fall. Swiftly the hillside below the two breathless Americans was bathed in fire. Terrific roaring mushrooms of green and gold flame soared upwards; gigantic fans of scarlet and orange flickered along the earth.

It seemed that the very ground beneath the adventurers trembled under the concussion of that merciless steel curtain. Somewhere behind the hilltop German batteries were making valiant, though ineffectual efforts to reply, adding their heart-stilling clamor to the uproar.

Huge invisible hands seemed to be slapping at Jake's face, and once, when a .210 detonated not far away, he had the sensation that a giant had suddenly placed a foot behind his shoulder blades and was crushing him flat to the quivering earth.

As though on the trail of the two Americans, the barrage steadily mounted the hill, while, with fingers crammed into his ears, Jake watched the scene from terrified eyes. In front of them lay the German trenches, doubtless swarming with pale-faced, determined men, and from below came the avalanche of destruction. Hissing, screaming fragments of shell and high explosive commenced to keen through the air above Jake's helmet.

SPEECH was impossible, so Jake tried to think instead.

"It's sure 'nough death to stay here," he decided, "but where in hell we goin' to go?"

Almost but not quite as sure, was the danger of death in the German trench system. Accordingly, he gripped Tug by the arm and was amazed to see how listless his companion had become. That dark stream running down his shirt must have been more copious than he had imagined.

By the light of the continually exploding shells, Jake could see the other's lips pressed shut in a hard, pain-tautened line. Then the prize fighter's mouth made motions. Evidently he was trying to say something, but his shouts might have been as the feeble peeping of a newly-hatched chick, for all the use they were in that tornado of sound.

Together the doomed machine gunners staggered to their feet, bent over and hurried forward, Jake slightly in advance with his bayoneted rifle held rigidly before him.

"Funny," he mused, "how thin them Frog bayonets are—bet they'd bend if you stuck them in good and hard." He yearned for the sturdy broad-bladed American type.

Something struck him a slight blow on the right thigh as he distinguished the outline of the trench parapet almost at his feet.

"I've been hit, too," he thought, when a warm trickle commenced to pour down his leg. "Can't be bad, though."

Each thought was a distinct effort, for the strain in his eardrums was maddening and the pungent acrid fumes of cordite, lyddite and T. N. T. rasped his throat like a demon's claws.

Reeling onwards into the hell of sounds, Jake waited for the inevitable finishing shot or grenade that would put an end to his soldiering once and for all, but just as the barrage came up behind with a diabolical scream, he

realized that the trench was apparently deserted, and with a gasping prayer of thankfulness, dropped into it.

Everywhere lay German equipment abandoned in the mad rush to safety—helmets, cartridge bandoliers, grenades and ammunition in tumbled heaps on the trench koor. Jake glanced over his shoulder and saw Tug seemingly somewhat recovered, for he stood swaying drunkenly on his feet, looking up and down the concrete trench with curious eyes.

There were several black-lettered signs—in German of course—fastened to the side of the trench, and a maze of telephone wires. Jake recognized by the feeble dawn light a gas alarm and a telephone, then hurried along, passing several dugout doors without investigating.

In a frail kind of shelter built of sheet iron he halted to crouch flat against the wet coldness of the concrete as the Allied barrage commenced methodically to knock the beautifully constructed German position into dusty smithereens.

Like a man who runs terrified through the woods, Jake crouched on the verge of madness, while hell itself seemed to erupt all about him. Dirt flew in his face. Hot scorching flames lashed the trench and, miraculously, large sections of it vanished with a series of grumbling roars.

Then, very suddenly, the worst of the barrage passed on. Over the brow of the hill it rolled, down behind the Sleeping Bear, there to pound and shatter the German support system and ammunition dumps.

Coincident with this departure came the deep sound of a cheer far down the valley. Jake and Tug never heard it. Their ears were bleeding and, for a time, quite useless. They crouched

like stunned men, half buried in the loose earth, and draped about with broken strands of barbed wire and telephone wire which, like gigantic octopi, waved trembling, menacing arms in the air.

WHAT aroused the dazed Southwerner at last was the persistent firing of several machine guns—*tack! tack! tack! tack!* not far away and slightly to the right.

Dimly he wondered who was firing and at what; then as he wiped the blood from his tortured ears the whole scene gradually came back to him. With a painful effort he glanced up, and after a final effort succeeded in focusing his eyes on long white scars gouged by H. E. from the side of the Sleeping Bear.

"Reckon the barrage didn't get that there pill-box after all," he mumbled to himself. God! how sick he felt—just like the time they struck the storm off Cape Race. "What was it that Kraut said? Oh, yes, them officers' quarters is under that pill box."

Deliberately, Jake drew two grenades from his pocket and with his teeth wrenched out the rings which held the detonating lever tight. Gray-faced and shaking as though with the ague, Tug followed suit.

On hands and knees, threading their way over the inconceivably jumbled dirt and concrete of the trench, the two Americans painfully made their way towards a blanket-hung dugout entrance.

"Anybody down there?" he demanded of the blackly yawning shaft.

"*Ja—ja!*" came a chorus of voices.

Back flew Jake's arm. He launched the first of the grenades down the shaft and flattened against the earth wall alongside.

Presently, there came a muffled explosion, the blanket cover bellied out in a cloud of smoke, emitting a howl.

"Let those bums digest dis meat ball," groaned Tug, as he hurled a second grenade. And so the two progressed stealthily along the length of the trench, halting at the mouth of each dugout and hurling down a bomb if there were any reply to their low-pitched queries. That they were completely alone in an enemy strong point and, surrounded by overwhelming numbers troubled them not at all.

Then at the mouth of one of the dugouts they encountered a blond, bull-necked sergeant-major in the act of emerging. Uttering a hoarse shout of astonishment he sprang back, swiftly leveled his Luger and shot Jake through the left forearm.

As the Southerner reeled, three or four helmeted Pomeranians surged forward, but Tug sprang in front of his disabled companion and, with a grenade weighting each fist, lashed madly to and fro. Never had he fought in the ring as he fought that moment; haymaker, cross, jab and hook, he used them all with telling effect. The astonished Pomeranians fell back into the dugout, affording Jake an opportunity to unpin a grenade and settle the question once and for all.

AS the gray smoke came curling out of the entrance, the two ragged and wounded Americans looked inquiringly at each other. Overhead, the nest's machine guns raged wickedly, in long rolling bursts that must be annihilating the charging khaki-clad men on the slopes below. Before the two Americans appeared the low-built door of a concrete passage and over it was nailed a sign which read "*Breslau Festung.*"

"How many meat balls you got left?" panted Jake, grim, wild-eyed and bleeding.

"Two."

"Got a couple myself. Let's go, Big Boy, and see if that damned chicken's cold yet." The pain distorted-grin on his face was terrible to see, as Tug nodded grimly.

So saying, the bloody, smoke-blackened twain with their uniforms in fluttering rags limped into the gloom of the passage entrance. Deliberately ignoring the downward flight of stairs which led to the officer's quarters and the chicken they craved, they groped upward toward that chamber where a half dozen well handled Maxims were noisily and effectively halting any advance up the valley below.

Jake and Tug halted breathlessly in the resounding passageway, as from behind came the warning clatter of boots and the booming sound of excited German voices. Ahead sounded more German voices excitedly crying for ammunition. Resolutely, the two Americans staggered to their feet, gripped their grenades and, one facing in each direction, stood ready to make a good end.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHARGE.

THERE were beads of cold sweat on the faces of Company D, of the 333rd Machine Gun Battalion. They had watched for the last fifteen minutes the heroic but tragically vain attempts of the successive infantry waves to storm the hill of the Sleeping Bear.

They had in numbed horror beheld the khaki-clad figures falling in howling, kicking heaps; and now it was

their turn. They knew it. They had seen Captain Andrews's face tighten as he unfolded a little square of paper given him by a panting runner who wore a bloody bandage beneath his helmet.

The machine gunners gripped their pieces, nervously awaiting the order to charge out into that field, seeking to select in advance the best cover possible for their Brownings. Full well they knew that they, too, would fall. The god of war must indeed be kind if one of their machine guns ever got into action.

How fearfully accurate and sustained was the fire from that infernal machine gun nest beneath the Sleeping Bear! Perfect gunnery if ever there was any! Eyes looked sidewise at one another, very white under the helmet's brim. Hands were plunged into pockets to conceal their trembling, and lips voiced coarse jokes to hide the prayers that arose from wildly beating hearts.

The last of the preceding wave had perished, hopelessly enfiladed from both sides of the valley. Why machine gunners were being sent out to set up guns in that comparatively unprotected terrain they could not guess; but there they were, poised on the edge of the trench and about to go forward. The baby-faced lieutenant with the little blond mustache who was Jake's nemesis, was now belying his appearance. With admirable courage, he strode back and forth quite fearlessly, atoning in that moment for his months of petty tyranny.

Then the whistle shrilled and number one men picked up their guns, lead-heavy with the water in their jackets; number two men carried the tripods, weighing some thirty-five pounds; number three men with four or more

boxes of belt ammunition and a can of water.

Staggering under the impedimenta, D Company started forward, the baby-faced lieutenant himself out in front bent under the weight of a tripod. Quite suddenly he collapsed, burying the steel frame beneath him. A gunner leaped forward and pulled aside the body, picking up the tripod and hurrying on, though the bullets hissed like wasps past his ears. Suddenly one whole gun was down, killed to the last man; the members of the squad oddly crumpled on the wet, bare ground.

Onward they went, and the Sleeping Bear seemed desperately far away. Another gun crew went out, completely annihilated. There were but eight left, and for a moment they hesitated, soul-sickened by the rain of death.

Onward they went, and the enemy gunners at the top of the hill commenced a return traverse. In another moment D Company would be wiped out; Captain Andrews braced himself for the quietus. Then high upon the hill something happened, for the deadly hail ceased.

Glancing up, he saw crawling streamers of dense white smoke pouring from the invisible gun ports of the pill box. From some reason the murderous machine gun nest beneath the Sleeping Bear had gone out of action.

TAKING fresh courage the company swept on. Though here and there men fell with sickening regularity, at last D Company reached its objectives and, grimly determined on vengeance, set up its machine guns to pound the invisible enemy's positions.

A little later, a wave of yelling French and Americans stormed the hill, astounded to find but very feeble re-

sistance from the intricate trench systems which covered its surface.

Captain Andrews, with two Browning guns moved up to take advantage of that precious strong point, and at his heels the machine gun squads cursed and panted under the weight of smoking Brownings. He arrived at the top coincidentally with a gray-faced French captain whose uniform was ripped and blackened beyond repair. Gravely the officer in blue saluted and Andrews replied briefly.

"Quick!" he said. "The Boche counter will begin soon. Before it starts we must mop up the dugouts!"

The Frenchman nodded and with eager infantry at their backs the two officers cautiously set foot in the passage leading to the nest. Lying on the floor they discovered several dead and desperately wounded Germans, their blood flowing in dark irregular channels towards the neat concrete drains carefully constructed by German engineers. The musty smell of blood and torn flesh was strong in the heavy air.

"Looks like a grenade went off in here," observed Andrews, as they picked their way over the fallen enemy and peered into the gun chamber. "What an awful mess!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" Even the Frenchman, hardened veteran that he was, was appalled at the sight that met his eyes. The walls were deeply pitted and four or five Maxims lay overturned and wrecked beyond repair. The water from their pierced cooling systems formed a great puddle in the center of the room, lapping at the faces of the terribly mangled gunners. It was a veritable slaughter pen that the bursting grenades had made of the gun chamber. Then from afar off came the murmur of voices. Instantly both officers stiffened.

"*Les misérables Boches!*" The French captain whipped a grenade from his pocket and with a pistol grasped in his right hand started forward on tiptoe with Captain Andrews a step behind. Along a smoke-filled corridor they crept until they encountered a flight of stairs.

"We are fortunate," murmured the Frenchman, and pointed his weapon at a sign marked "*Offizieren.*"

"There are yet some alive—perhaps we shall take a colonel or two."

Very cautiously the two officers advanced and were astounded to encounter the feeble amber-tinted rays of a lamp gleaming from a passage to the right. Again came the murmur of voices, very faint and feeble.

"They're in there," whispered the American, pushing by. Tensed to kill, they moved silently on until they reached the lamp-lit doorway. Pistols leveled, they looked inside and halted as though paralyzed.

ON the cement floor of the low-ceilinged, stein-hung room lay perhaps half a dozen German officers—all dead, if one were to judge by the pools of blood, and the crumpled positions of the men sprawled about an upset table, whose cloth dangled shroud-like to the floor. Everywhere glinted bits of shattered glasses, plates and far-scattered table ware.

But what chiefly drew Captain Andrews's attention was the vision of two American soldiers, one of them lying helpless on the floor, a shattered leg trailing out behind, and the other khaki-clad figure weakly propped against the dugout's cement wall with his bloodless face waxlike by the light of a solitary lantern.

"It's Corporal Tourneur and Schmalz!" murmured Andrews in won-

der too deep for expression. "Why, I thought they went 'over the hill' back in the S. O. S. May I be eternally damned!"

"*Dieu!*" The Frenchman turned in blank astonishment. "But what is it they do? Are they mad, to eat at a time like this?"

One of the wounded—he who lay flat on the floor—not seeing the two officers standing in the shadowy passage leading to the ruined pill box, began to speak in a feeble voice that was interrupted by stifled groans.

"As Ah was sayin', Tug," said he and rolled on his back the better to gnaw a plump second joint, "this here's the best piece of chicken Ah ever ate."

"You said a mouthful," mumbled the lesser figure, making a ghastly effort to snatch another half chicken from a brown pile that, stacked on a platter, lay squarely between the two blood-soaked figures in khaki.

"And believe me, Big Boy," sighed Jake, pitching away the leg bone, "Ah jes' goin' to nacherally kill the first son of a buzzard that tries to stop me afore Ah've et all the chicken Ah wants."

Captain Andrews's anxious face relaxed and, turning, he pulled the Frenchman by the sleeve. "I think," he suggested smilingly, "they've earned that dinner—and, besides, I imagine it might be unwise to interrupt them now."

THE END.



Thuggee

PERHAPS the most revolting of the Hindu deities is Kali, a popular Bengali goddess reputed to delight in the most monstrous of crimes. Her image is represented as many-armed, each hand clutching a sword. Her chin is painted with blood. About her neck hangs a rope of human skulls.

So great was her hold on the native mind that at one time her followers organized a wickedly criminal class known as Thuggee. Adoring this vile goddess, the Thug committed brutish crimes to glorify her name. Before the Sepoy Rebellion the country boasted hundreds of these professional assassins. Anxious to murder in the name of Kali they infested Indian villages to plunder and kill the natives, and would lend a hired hand for any homicide. A singular religious order!

Early in 1800 the British government set out to extirpate the noxious cult. By the time of the Mutiny, the Thugs had been crushed to a scattered group. The Rebellion gave them a chance to operate once more, but the British police, organizing a special "Thuggee Department," cleared them out again.

Save for certain outlying mountain districts, the Thug of India has gone. But the image of Kali still appears on the holy days of Durga Poojah to be worshiped by millions of devout Hindus. In fact, the city of Calcutta is named after her. William Butler, D. D., in "The Land of the Veda" traces the name of the giant Asian metropolis to the fiendish goddess's shrine and the burning *ghat* there. Kali and *ghat*. Turned by foreign tongue into Calcutta.

(Theodore Roscoe.



"Don't go callin' me names, you hydrophobia skunk!" snorted Jedediah

The WH Brand

The ever-present threat of another murder hangs over the "Woman Hater" Ranch and its loyal defender, Jack Foster

By F. R. BUCKLEY

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JACK FOSTER, young cow-puncher, rides to the WH Ranch in Texas, where he knows the owner, Matthias Holton, is a woman-hater; for Jack has been disappointed in love. Bill Buldo, the foreman, tries to bully Jack and is whipped; and Holton fires Buldo for his trouble-making and because of the probability that he's sold out to the oil syndicate trying to grab the ranch.

Jack and the new foreman, old Jedediah Wilks, ride to the spring that supplies WH Ranch's water, and drive off two men who were poisoning it with arsenic. Jedediah stays on guard while Jack rides for help. He finds Holton

in his own library, dying from a bullet wound. With his last breath the old man begs Jack to take care of his estranged daughter whom he had driven from the ranch by his old-fashioned, narrow ways.

CHAPTER IV.

ACCUSATIONS.

A WEEK later; and Matthias Holton's mortal frame was gone forever from the home of his fathers. In his place behind the wide table there sat, at two o'clock of this

This story began in the Argosy for November 9.

baking afternoon, a younger man dressed in the neatest of gentleman's lounge suitings, noticeable, in person and manner as well as in attire, for a certain sleekness.

He had black hair, drawn back from a high forehead by some preparation guaranteed to keep it in place during a hurricane; large black eyes of a singular and not too pleasing mobility; and, under a black mustache of the tooth-brush variety, a small mouth.

Nothing could have exceeded the spotlessness of his linen—he was actually wearing, in this abominable weather, starched cuffs; emerging from which, a pair of slim, white and elegantly manicured hands were manipulating a red-sealed document.

At the moment, the large black eyes, having flickered for some seconds from Jedediah Wilks to Jack Foster as the two men stood before the table, settled on Jedediah. The foreman helped himself unasked to a chair; indicated a similar procedure to Foster, and returned the gaze unflinchingly.

"I don't understand you," said Mr. James Carteret. "Just what do you mean, if anything?"

"I thought," said Wilks, "I'd made it clear. Bein' as I didn't, here goes again. You been throwin' your weight around here ever since Mr. Holton died, claimin' to represent this brother's son of his, the next of kin. I ain't said nothin' heretofore, because I didn't have permission to do so. But when you come down yesterday an' made as if to fire all hands now herein employed, why, I figured it was time to do somethin', which I done as afore-said. And wherefore now I tell you—"

The lawyer laid down the paper he was holding and turned to the younger man.

"What's he talking about? With

these legal phrases he insists on using, there's no understanding him at all."

"They're as good as—" began Wilks indignantly, but Jack Foster laid a hand on his arm.

"The fact is, Mr. Carteret," he said slowly, "that this heir-at-law of yours isn't the heir at all. I suppose that after Mr. Holton made that will you're holding, he got to thinking that he hadn't acted just right with his daughter. He made another will—with Wilks and the cook for witnesses—leaving everything to her; and he told Jedediah where it was to be found in case of his death. It was in a secret drawer of that table you're sittin' at. The only thing was, that Mr. Wilks didn't know Miss Holton's present address. The old boss used to claim he burned all her letters unread; but he didn't, and in looking for the will, Jedediah accidentally stumbled on another secret drawer containing a packet of them. So he wrote her, notifying her of what had happened; and when you fired us all yesterday, he followed up the letter with a wire. You saw her answer. She'll be here this afternoon; and meantime, we stay on."

SLOWLY a change was becoming visible in the face of Mr. James Carteret, attorney-at-law; a change much out of proportion, it seemed, to the news that was causing it. Never of a rosy complexion, he had gone deathly pale; his eyes, so full and liquid, seemed to have narrowed almost to slits; and the red lips, formerly such a noticeable feature of his face, had suddenly compressed themselves so as to be almost invisible. Even his pleasant barytone voice had suffered to the extent of acquiring a strange tremor and huskiness.

"You claim," he said, "that Mr.

Holton executed another will—without consulting me?"

Jedediah Wilks sprang from his chair and wagged a furious finger under the lawyer's nose.

"Yeah, I do claim it!" he cried. "An' what's more, I'm ready to prove it to the proper parties. And furthermore—besides that, I'll tell you why he didn't consult you. Don't you think for a moment that the old boss was the fool you figured him! He trusted your father with everything he had, but that didn't go for the son, young feller, me lad, and don't think it did. He knew what you were playin' at! He knew about your makin' his will in favor of his brother's son, an' then goin' down an' buyin' half the boy's interest off him for ten thousand bucks. What's more'n that, he knew about your tryin' to double cross the boy, and get Bill Buldo to run down the ranch so that the half interest you hadn't got would be worth nothin', an' you could get the whole place cheap!"

The lawyer rose.

"Why, you—" he began.

The gnarled finger waved once more under his nose; having done which, it returned to assist its corresponding hand in balling into a fist.

"Don't you call me names, you white-livered hydrophobia skunk," growled Jedediah Wilks. "I'm holdin' off you now, but it's all I can do. It was all I could do when you came over, these last couple months, an' sat there drinkin' the boss's whisky an' talkin' about this here mysterious syndicate that wanted our land—him knowin' all the time, an' me knowin' all the time, that you was workin' hand in glove with 'em, if you wasn't them yourself, you dressed-up, false-faced Judas Iscariot, you. He was on to your little schemes. An' I'll tell you somethin'

else. I'll bet he knew who had him murdered. Or if he didn't, I do!"

The lawyer's face was livid; his voice, when after licking his lips he essayed to use it, had sunk to an almost inaudible whisper.

"You claim," he said hoarsely, "that I— You dare to imply that I—"

"Yeah," blared Jedediah Wilks, "I do! An' if you don't like it—"

"Shut up," said the voice of Jack Foster calmly.

His eyes met those of Carteret in a level stare.

"The way I see it," said the new hand, "is that there's no need for quarrelling. Your man isn't the heir, Mr. Carteret, and consequently you cut no ice around here. Wilks is an old friend of Miss Holton; and I promised her father on his death-bed that I'd—stick around. So that until the will is probated, we'll stay in charge of the ranch; an' since you've nothin' to do here, seems as though you might as well get out. Any suspicions about land-grabbin' an' murder aren't to the point. All we have to say about that—suspicions an' all—we've said to the sheriff. If you want to talk about anythin' else, it might be well to wait until Miss Holton gets here on the five forty train."

WITH an effort, the lawyer regained a measure of self-control.

"If," he said, carefully steadying his voice and fixing his narrowed eyes on Wilks, "you have charged me, to Sheriff Walker, with the crime of murder—"

Jack Foster, apprehensive of the foreman's temper, threw out a restraining arm; but old Jedediah Wilks was not to be repressed.

"Charged you with the crime!" he

roared, leaning over the table and laughing into Mr. Carteret's face. "Claim you went an' pulled a dirty trigger? Why, no. I'd as soon claim you was holdin' one end of the bag of arsenic we happened to fish out of the spring a week ago. But you know Bill Buldo, don't you? An' he's got a 30-30 rifle, hasn't he? We're lettin' the sheriff figure out the connection."

"Jed!"

"You shut up yourself," snarled the old foreman at his junior. Once more the knotted finger appeared; not shaken this time; pointed like a sign-post of doom.

"Another thing, Mr. Lawyer; don't bank too much on Sheriff Ed Walker's bein' nigh toward feeble-minded, an' anyhow more took up with his feed business than he is on bein' a peace-officer. He may be a fool, but I ain't; an' if he can't see through a brick wall, I'll lend him an X-ray. An' if, when he's seen through it, he don't feel like pursuin' what he sees there, an' catchin' it, an' deliverin' it up to be hanged by the neck until dead, by the Lord I'll get on his back an' spur him till he does! My name is Jedediah Wilks, pretty well known around here; an' what I promise, that I perform. Mark me, an' govern yourself accordin'."

Lowering the finger, and wiping beads of perspiration from his brow, Wilks dismissed Mr. Carteret from the realm of thought, and drew a vast silver watch from his pocket.

"The hour hand's at six an' the minute hand's at the figure X," he ruminated, passing a thumb reflectively across the crystal. "That means it's about seventeen 'r eighteen minutes past two. Jack, you'd better be startin'. The big umbrella's rigged in the buckboard, ain't it? Well, then, you better take a few of the cushions outa here.

Alice's prob'ly got outa the way o' ridin' twelve miles on bare wood. I'll see to this lawyer-guy. You should be in Hurst City by three thirty anyhow; which 'll give you nice time to do—what we're talkin' about. G'by."

CHAPTER V.

THE LAW IN HURST COUNTY.

IT was, in fact, at three thirty to the minute that Jack Foster, having tied the buckboard in the station yard, entered the office of Edward M. Walker, sheriff of Hurst County.

It was—for the center of law-enforcement for a thousand square miles—a singularly sleepy place. Its windows, whose cleanliness depended on the sheriff's willingness to part with some of his appropriation for expenses, were covered with grime; cobwebs of immemorial age hung from corners of the ceiling. The walls, of a dismal yellowish buff, were at their best where they were concealed by rows of "Wanted" notices; mostly for criminals long since disposed of.

The official handcuffs—some half dozen pairs of them, all showing tarnished surfaces indicative of long disuse—hung over the rusty stove. Near the stove, his feet on the opened door of a filing cabinet, his chair tilted to a comfortable angle by volumes of depositions carefully placed under its front legs, Sheriff Ed Walker was sleeping the sleep of the just. He was a fat man, dressed mainly in trousers and a pink-striped shirt. A handkerchief, doubtless placed in position with the idea of protecting his face and bald head from flies, bellied sail-fashion with his snores.

Jack Foster dug him in the ribs. There was no answer; no sign of that

instinctive motion common among sheriffs of a different stamp—the reaching for a gun belt and star placed in readiness for emergency.

In fact, Mr. Walker was not a sheriff, and did not like to be alluded to as such. He was a business man, elected to office by a community which, in a black year, had got too far behind with its grain and feed bills.

His function, as he saw it, was to collect certain sums of money for taking prisoners out of jail to court and back from court to jail, and so on; and when there was no money to be collected, it was his right—also as he saw it—to sleep. He continued to do so, until his visitor kicked away his legs from the filing cabinet and the books from under his chair.

"What the—" choked Mr. Walker, waking and snatching off the handkerchief.

His eyes met Jack Foster's.

"Oh," he said, collecting his faculties. "It's you, is it? Well, I ain't got any news for you, and if I did have, that's no way to come into a man's office. Where do you think you are, anyway? What do you think I am?"

"I dunno," Foster assured him. "I used to think you were a sheriff. However, that bein' over, I'm quite puzzled. Ne'er mind. Since you haven't any news—I presume you mean about the murder of Mr. Holton—I'll ask you somethin' else. Why haven't you any news?"

The sheriff eyed him with disfavor.

"Now look a here, young man," said he. "I got somethin' to say to you. You be careful. Get me? Murder ain't a word to be thrown about the way you seem to think it is. It's easy to come here complainin' about murders—"

"What do you think it was? Suicide?"

"Never mind what I think it was. You nigh to got me into a fine peck of trouble, young man; an' if you haven't actually got yourself into it, I'm very much surprised. You an' Jed Wilks accused Bill Buldo of shootin' the said Holton, an'—"

"We did not. We told you—"

"It's all the same," said the sheriff, waving a pudgy hand. "I had Buldo up here, an' I told him what you said, an' of course he proved himself innocent at once. Had Lawyer Carteret to speak for him—the chairman of the very committee that nominated me for this job, mind you, an' me havin' to apologize to him; an' he had four 'r five witnesses to prove an alibi."

"Who were the witnesses?"

"Never mind who they were," said the sheriff, waving the hand again. "If they satisfied me, that ought to satisfy you, an' I'll thank you to let it. One was George Miles, from the Circle O, an' another was an oil-driller from that well over on the Crazy J, an' another was—but what's that matter? They and Buldo was playin' poker together all that evenin', twenty miles from the WH."

"Lawyer Carteret know any of these men? George—what's his name?—Miles, for instance? Is he a puncher?"

"Cert'nly he's a puncher, an' a better one than you'll ever be; or he was, 'fore he got to be a tool-dresser for the wells. An' certainly Mr. Carteret knows him. Didn't he pull him outa a murder charge a few years back?"

"You seem," said Jack Foster, "to specialize in murderers around here."

THE sheriff surveyed him bulbously. There was no harm in Ed Walker, any one could see that; no harm, that is, except the harm that must always accrue to communities

from stupid, lazy men in high places. He was an honest man, according to his lights; most conscientious in his dealings in grain and feed; but inclined, like many of his kind, to regard the public service as something not subject to the rules of ordinary business. He did not graft; he did not use the power of his office for his own ends. He merely slept; and he objected to being awakened.

"I've told you once," he said, "an' I'll tell you again, young man, that you'll get yourself in trouble before you're through. I'm sheriff here, an' I calculate to run my office the way I feel like. If you don't care for it, you might go back to wherever it is you come from, an' let any kick that's comin' come from the folks that elected me."

"Is Jed Wilks one?"

The sheriff appeared to swallow a pill. Judging by his expression, it was not of pleasant taste.

"Meantime," he continued, nevertheless, ignoring the question, "if you want to take a whole hide home to your folks, you do as I tell you, bud, an' don't go around callin' too many folks murderers."

Groping for his scattered volumes, he replaced them under the legs of his chair, replaced the handkerchief, and once more elevated his feet to the comfort of the filing-cabinet. The interview, very evidently, was at a close.

"Anything else?" demanded Jack Foster sarcastically.

The handkerchief was removed.

"Yeah," said the sheriff. "There's this. Since you've talked as much as you have, I'll say nothin' about your makin' a fool of me by it—but don't give me any more trouble. Steer clear of Bill Buldo. Good afternoon."

It was a savage young man who,

stepping forth from that somnolent den into the sunlight, walked along the blazing sidewalks of Main Street toward the station. To right and left, stores offered eye-catching displays of everything from cold drinks to saddlery; an occasional girl, tripping along the shady side of the street, looked with provocative interest at the tall, lean man in the holiday clothes, who held his jaw so rigidly set, and who walked as though he were looking for some one.

Jack Foster saw none of them. With his mind's eye he was endeavoring to take a simultaneous view of the present, the past as told to him by Jed Wilks, and the future; and he had little vision left for things less urgent.

With his bodily eyes he did, however, see the station yard, with the buckboard waiting where he had left it; he saw the five-forty draw in, come to a grinding stop, and discharge one passenger—a slim girl in a suit of white flannel.

Then, suddenly appearing before him, right hand extended to hold something hard against his ribs, he saw Bill Buldo.

"I want," said the ex-foreman hoarsely, "a word with you."

FOR a moment the two men stood eye to eye. A revolver, the duplicate of the single-action .45 which Buldo was covering with his left hand while his right forefinger caressed the trigger, hung at Foster's belt, its butt not six inches from his hand. He could have leaped aside, risking Buldo's bullet, drawn, and shot it out; it was the opinion of the station loungers who crowded around, not too close, and whispered excitedly one to another, that he would do just this. He

looked scarcely the type of man to eat crow for Bill Buldo or anybody else. The circle of onlookers drew back in the direction of the eight-inch posts supporting the station roof.

"You been flappin' your mouth about me, I hear," said the man with the gun. "Chargin' me with murder, they tell me. Got anything to say now?"

"It's comin'!" whispered one of the loungers. "Hey, lemme have some o' that post!"

Jack Foster's eyes had not wavered from Buldo's. Simply, his lips had tightened until around them showed a thin line of white.

"Nothin', eh? Well, you're gonna say somethin'. I could sue you for slander, but that ain't my way. I like these things settled as between man an' man. So I tell you what I'm gonna do."

He had already licked his lips preparatory to describing how Mr. Foster was to kneel down then and there before and confess his divers sins and wickednesses to all such as cared to hear, when the unexpected left Buldo, as it is liable to leave bullies of his mental caliber, utterly at a loss.

Without speaking a word, without making a motion save the necessary ones with his legs, apparently oblivious of the revolver at his ribs, and indeed of the existence of the man who held it, Jack Foster stepped forward, shouldering Mr. Buldo slightly as he went, and approached the girl in white upon the platform.

Arrived before her, he raised his hat. "Miss Holton?"

"Y-yes."

Her dark eyes, wide with terror, looked past him; though at that moment Bill Buldo was not a particularly terrifying object. He was standing

where Jack had left him, his mouth open, the revolver loose in his hand, staring incredulously at Jack Foster's back.

"Any baggage, miss?"

"I—I—oh, look out!"

The mouth had closed, the revolver had been taken in a grip of renewed firmness; Mr. Buldo was coming. The traprock of the station driveway crunched under his approaching heels, but Foster paid not the slightest attention to it.

"I reckon this 'll be yours," he said, picking up a small handbag. "Trunks comin' on a later train, miss?"

"Y-yes. Oh—"

Mr. Buldo had taken up a new position—just where Jack Foster, turning as he now did, must come face to face with him for the second time. He had dropped the polite concealment afforded by his left hand; he stood there with gun showing, and a look in his eyes which, though not directed at Alice Holton, held the girl's gaze fascinated, as a snake's does that of a bird.

Bill Buldo was not, at any time, of a reassuring aspect; now the innermost horrors of his being were on display in his hairy face. Alice Holton trembled; even the station loungers, in their bullet-proof shelters, experienced slight pricklings of the backbone. The only person to seem quite unaffected was, strangely enough, the man for whom the exhibition was being staged.

"That's the buckboard over there," said Jack Foster calmly. "After you, miss."

"You, feller—" croaked Mr. Buldo. And was again ignored!

For an instant the dark eyes of the man he held, to all intents and purposes unarmed, at the muzzle of his gun, met his; and there was that in them which chilled Mr. Buldo's soul. Fearlessness,

for one thing; abysmal contempt for another; and then again—but the ex-foreman had no time to go further with his analysis, even if he got so far.

Buldo found himself, gun still in hand, a turmoil of murder in his brain, looking at the broad back of his enemy, as Foster, hand lightly clasping Miss Holton's elbow, led the girl across the sunlit space toward the buckboard. In another moment both had mounted to the seat, and in still another they were gone.

A cloud of dust, flung up by the wheels, floated for an instant in the golden air and vanished.

BEFORE Mr. Buldo had convinced the loungers that he was in no mood to explain anything, the buckboard was out of Hurst City, bowling along the trail toward the WH.

"Feelin' the heat, miss?"

"No; I just feel faint."

The horses came to a halt. Impersonally—indeed, coldly—Jack Foster examined his passenger's face. It was very pale, the red lips were trembling; the brown eyes under the dark lashes seemed larger even than they had at the station.

"If you can hold out another mile or so, miss," he said. "There's a brook. Or we could turn back to the city an'—"

"No! No! I don't want to go back there! It isn't the heat. It's just that—that horrible man. Oh, drive on!"

"Yes, miss."

The horses jogged obediently over another hundred yards; during which, hands twisted in her lap, Alice Holton fought to gain possession of herself. Foster, eyes on the horses' ears, sat motionless under the umbrella.

"Who—who was he?"

"He used to be foreman of the ranch; miss. Name of Buldo."

For an instant, the girl looked at the impassive profile at her side, waiting for amplification of this statement. None came.

"He's—he's got some grudge against you?"

"Yes, miss."

"What is it?" cried Alice Holton, half hysterically. "He said something about your accusing him of—of murder. Was it about?"—something like a sob interrupted her—"about daddy?"

"Partly, miss." The sob seemed to have had its effect. Jack Foster's eyes wavered from their stare ahead, and glanced momentarily at the girl. Her head, stripped of its coquettish white hat, was bare; certain tendrils of dark hair fluttered in the breeze stirred by the cart's movement. The driver averted his eyes forthwith; but abandoned, for the time being, his policy of monosyllables. "I had some argument with him when I came to the ranch, miss. Mr. Holton discharged him, an' took me on."

"Who's foreman now?"

"Mr. Wilks, miss."

"How long have you been there?"

"Seven, eight days, miss."

"Has the sheriff—has anything been done?"

"No, miss."

NOW, without preliminaries or attempt at concealment, the girl burst into tears. Ever since Wilks's letter, with its terrible news broken with the tactlessness of one who can hardly write, had reached her among strangers, Alice Holton had perforce and by natural disposition, contained her emotions.

During the long, hot journey to Hurst City she had appeared before her fellow-travelers as a calm young lady engrossed in a magazine—the words of which had floated meaninglessly before her eyes. On the station platform, imminent danger had for the moment distracted her; but now, after the fashion of stronger human beings when, sorely tried, they reach home, she broke down completely.

Hands over her face, her softly rounded elbows resting on the smart white flannel of her knees, she wept as though her heart would break. And Mr. Jack Foster, imperturbable save for a fine dew of perspiration which gathered suddenly on his heretofore dry brow, drove on without turning his head.

"Oh, dear!" the girl whispered. The buckboard had topped the last rise before the WH; the ranch was in sight. From a pocket ornamented with her initials in monogram, Alice pulled forth a square inch of cambric, which she devoted to the drying of her eyes. This done, she gauged the distance between herself and the crowd of punchers that was gathered, old Jedediah Wilks at its head, before the ranch house; and turned resolutely to Mr. Foster.

"I don't know what's the matter with you," she said frankly. "I think you're one of the rudest men I ever met. But also, one of the bravest."

The driver gave no sign.

"Wilks said something about trouble on the ranch," the girl went on, tearing her handkerchief across the middle. "And even if you don't like me—"

She paused. The silence was broken only by the wheels and a faint cheer from Jedediah.

"—I hope you'll stay with us until—until it's cleared up."

For the second time during that drive, Jack Foster turned his head. As his eyes met hers, Miss Holton experienced a peculiar sensation, something after the fashion of an electric shock. It is a known fact, thoroughly established by medical science, that no human being can transfer electricity without feeling its vibrations himself; but Mr. Foster showed no sign of any such thing; unless one counts the suddenness with which he turned his eyes away again, to fasten them on those eternal horses' ears.

"Yes, miss," he said.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE RIDE.

AS Jedediah Wilks remarked fifty times during the next fourteen days—with a sidelong glance that left Jack Foster both puzzled and annoyed—it might be possible to hate Alice Holton as a woman; but it was impossible to despise her, as a woman or as anything else.

She had wept on the way home from the station. Arrived at the home from which she had been exiled, she had sobbed on Jed's shoulder for the sentimental reason that her daddy had been buried while yet her address was unknown. And that was the end and total extent of her feminine susceptibility.

The next day she had found an attorney—a shabby old gentleman, devoid of sartorial graces, but well-versed in the law, and so upright that his goatee was horizontal. The day after that, the new will was offered for probate; and Alice, in town to appear as executrix and sole legatee, spoke winged words to Hurst City's leading and only firm of decorators.

Men with ladders, and women with mouths full of pins, scurried before the amazed eyes of the cow-hands; paper appeared on walls; paint covered ancient scars on the buildings until honestly, according to Jedediah, a guy that went in for liquor to any extent would never have been able to find his way home. Curtains in the ranch house lost that gray look which had served Fung Ah Lo for white; and the masculine leather of the living room furniture disappeared under a flood of chintz slip-covers.

The animal heads looked down upon the change as though—Jedediah again—"they kinda liked it;" certainly Wilks himself took to woman-ownership like a duck to water. Alone of those who came much in contact with Alice and her works, Jack Foster remained unbrightened, unsoftened, and otherwise unaffected.

It was his custom, as Jed Wilks's unofficial second-in-command, to attend the conferences at which the girl was learning the ins and outs of her new property; and it was his habit to sit through them with much the impassivity and downcast gaze of a statue.

One of these conferences was coming to its close when the girl, flushing suddenly, darted a question:

"And you," she snapped at the silent man, "what do you think?"

Jack Foster raised his gaze from the carpet.

"I'd be inclined, miss," he said respectfully, "to take Wilks's word for it. If he thinks our men have been bribed an' bought by whoever it is—"

"It's that Carteret!" roared the foreman, thumping the table with his fist. "It is! Don't tell me!"

"I don't think," concluded Foster, "that you'd be wrong in following his opinion."

Alice Holton played with a pen.

"But you," she said, her eyes strangely intent on Jack's face, "have you no opinion of your own?"

"I've been out most of the time, seeing the fence-work fixed up as you wished it, miss. I haven't had much opportunity—"

"Is the fencing finished?"

Wilks, perspiring slightly in an atmosphere whose tension he could feel, endeavored to intervene. Slapping Foster loudly on the shoulder, he turned upon Alice a smile whose intensity might well have made up for the one so noticeably lacking from the face of the younger man.

"If Jack's been in charge of it," said the foreman, with the heartiness born of extreme discomfort, "you can bet your shirt—skirt, I mean—no, darn it; but you can be sure it's havin' attention—fencin' or fighin'. He—"

Alice Holton got up. To her flush had succeeded a peculiar pallor, and her eyes were ominous.

"Is your horse saddled?" she inquired coldly of Jack Foster.

He rose likewise. Jed, the peacemaker, sat open-mouthed in his chair, staring from girl to young man with apprehension.

"I can have him ready in a minute, miss."

"Please do so, and have Firefly saddled for me."

"Are you goin' out, miss?" said Jedediah rather dazedly.

"Yes," said Alice Holton; and left the room.

The old foreman, following her exit with his eyes, pursed his lips, shook his head, looked at his junior with foreboding.

"Don't give her Firefly," he said absently, "he's too fresh, an' you'll have trouble enough without him. Son, I

been a warnin' you the best way I knew how, an' now you're for it. It's my personal opinion that you're goin' to catch hell."

AS a matter of fact, from the back of Firefly—Alice having told Jedediah Wilks, at some length, that her orders were to be executed precisely as issued—Tartarus was indeed administered to Jack Foster. The first heat-waves, with promise of fire, brimstone, and pitchforks to come, swept over him as he rode with his girl-boss up the slope toward the water-tank.

"Would you mind explaining," she asked, "just what you mean by your behavior?"

She stopped his speech with a raised hand.

"I don't care to listen to any questions about what I mean," she said. "They're customary under the circumstances, but we'll dispense with them to-day. You know perfectly well what I mean. Though I'll give you a few of the symptoms. First, you look through me when you ought to be looking at me. This doesn't interfere with your work, but as a woman, I don't like it. Secondly, you never volunteer a remark, and when you're asked a question by me, you reply as shortly as possible. I shouldn't mind that, if you were equally curt with Jed, say, or with Fung Ah Lo; but under the circumstances, it displeases me. Thirdly, you seem to think I'm likely to bite, or take a shot at you or something, and that the sooner you can get out of my range, the better will be your chances of living to a ripe old age. All in all, you treat me like a rattlesnake whose head you'd bash in if it didn't belong to a friend. I've been perfectly candid with you, which I suppose will make you act

more rudely than ever; but I do wish you'd be equally frank and tell me why all this. In fact, I think I've more or less the right to know."

The horses ambled amicably along together. Jack Foster said nothing.

"You don't tell me that if I don't like your manners you'll quit?" asked the girl ironically. "I expected that."

"No, miss. You see—"

"Well?"

"Your father—asked me to stick around; an' I promised."

"If that's all that's detaining you," said Miss Holton with a coldness that shivered, "please don't let it. I'll absolve you from your promise with pleasure."

"It wasn't," said Jack Foster slowly, "given to you, miss."

The girl bit her lip.

"I'm sorry," said the young man thoughtfully, "if I've been lackin' in respect."

"You haven't!" Firefly, startled by the sharpness of the tone, stepped forward as though about to break into a gallop; and stopped resentfully as the bit jammed back hard. "You know perfectly well—oh, what's the use of this? I think I must be insane, or something."

Indeed, there had just rushed into Miss Holton's mind a wonder whether this extreme statement might not be the literal truth. She, a girl and owner of a ranch, riding out with a paid hand she had known a week, and asking him, almost in so many words, what she had done to offend him! Biting her lip again, as she waited despite herself for Jack's reply, she thought of melancholia, neurasthenia, and dementia præcox; and decided she was suffering from all of them.

Only a round-chested blackbird, veteran of three mating seasons and

now sitting on a branch to await another, regarded her with approval.

"I 'M doin' the best I know how," said Jack Foster; and the blackbird rolled one bright black eye at him. Possibly it was the hoarseness of the young man's voice that interested him; or perhaps the omission of the inevitable "miss."

It was Alice's turn to be silent.

"You'll have to excuse me, miss," said the young man. "It ain't that I aim to be rude, or hurt your feelin's or anything, but I—I'm kind of uncomfortable with women. I told your father—"

He paused, and glanced wildly at the girl, as she saw perfectly well, of course, for all that her eyes appeared to be focused on the center of the visible horizon. Bees, according to scientists, can see all around themselves. So, under certain circumstances, can women.

"I was in the army—"

Miss Holton suddenly displayed interest.

"Oh, were you? In the war? What regiment?"

"Cavalry, miss."

"Really? I had a friend who was an officer in the Tank Corps. There wasn't much riding, was there?"

"No, miss. Trenches."

"And did you," asked Miss Holton with great zeal, "get any medals or anything?"

Her eyes fell before Jack Foster's—as well they might. Having broken down his reserve, she had, for the last two minutes, been pretending that she cared nothing about what lay behind it, after all; and there was that in his eyes which told her that he was well aware of the trick. By her last two speeches, she had been endeavoring to

transfer her own embarrassment to him; and he knew it.

"Yes, miss," said Jack Foster. "I got some medals. Everybody did. But what I was goin' to tell you was that while I was gettin' 'em, the girl I was gettin' 'em for—the girl—a girl sold me out an' then laughed at me for bein' fool enough to mind. Since then, I haven't had much use for women. There's nothin' personal in it. I'll try—not to take it out on you."

She had been at fault; she knew it. It had been none of her business why this man was silent, so long as he did the work for which he was paid; she had made it her business, and asked questions she had had no right to ask. And when he, relinquishing his own rights, had answered, she had mocked at him.

He had been guiltless, save of a look and, now, of a clumsy speech; but feminine human nature is prone to justify itself; and the more it has been at fault, the less scrupulous it is about the method.

Alice Holton looked up with flaming cheeks.

"Am I to understand," she asked, "that you think—that you imagine *me* to be in the same position as your lady friend?"

She had pulled her horse to a halt viciously, as she was now speaking. Jack Foster, following suit, looked at her calmly and impersonally. Firefly, champing a mouth that ached, laid his ears back very slightly from their normal position, and rolled an eye showing rather more than usual of white—of which phenomena, Firefly's rider remained oblivious.

"I beg you to believe," she said, her cheeks tangibly afire, "that it's not my intention to sell you out; or, indeed, have any other dealings with you than

those for which you were hired. Therefore, it will be quite unnecessary for you to protect yourself."

"Miss!"

"Be quiet!" cried Alice Holton sharply.

AT the words, Firefly came to a precise conclusion as to what would compensate him for those sharp tugs at his bridle, and those sharper words which had been fretting his sensitive nerves. A nice, long gallop across the prairie, without thought of bits and spurs; a gallop going whither he willed, as fast as he liked, and terminating when he was good and ready—that would be the thing to give him back his self-respect, and work off the superfluous energy he felt bubbling inside him.

The decision taken, there was no use in delay; and Firefly stood not upon the order of his going. With a bound that jerked the bridle out of Alice's fingers, he was gone, scuttering across the brown grass like an overgrown jack-rabbit; bolting, as it happened, straight toward the water supply stream of the WH.

As far as the stream was concerned, this was well enough; Firefly could have covered its three yards of breadth in his stride, without considering it a jump. Only—as Jack Foster saw with horror in the moment before his spurs went rowelling deep into his own horse—at this point the stream chanced to run between banks forty feet high; rocky, and floored with rock, flaring out from their narrow bed of the brook to a ground level gap of a dozen yards. The nearer edge of the chasm was masked with sagebrush—scrubby, low stuff just capable of concealing the gulf beyond.

Firefly, bit between his teeth and his

mind in a turmoil, would not see the death-trap until, at the speed he was going, it would be too late to stop; the jump would be impossible.

Flying forward in the track of the bolted horse, spurs and quirt going furiously, Jack Foster saw, in his mind's eye, the plunge through the shrubbery; the sudden disappearance of Firefly's fore-quarters, the despairing scramble of the hind, and the crash of horse and girl upon the jagged rocks below.

Only fifty yards to go—and he was still as many feet behind the fugitive; making, it seemed in that frantic moment, no progress. He set his teeth. Strange act in a crisis whose outcome was to be reckoned in seconds, he closed his eyes; and, with the savagery of desperation, raked his scudding pony most cruelly fore and aft. The drumming hoofs ahead of him seemed nearer. He opened his eyes.

His pony's head was level with Firefly's rump. The spurs again. He was within reach of Alice—and here, not ten yards away, was the ravine.

With a yell that seemed to come from some other throat miles away, Jack flung out his left arm and, at the apex of a spurt of speed forced by the dripping spurs, flung it violently about the girl's waist. Firefly, his peril before him, tried to stop. His forehead skidded in the rubble of the cañon's edge; despite the desperate braking of his hind legs, they were over; then, as a weight was snatched suddenly from his back, he made a mighty effort and—recovered.

Foster's horse, turned at the brink by a wrench that had snapped the left rein of the bridle, stood sweating and trembling under a double burden.

"You—all right?" whispered the man.

He asked although, by the limpness

of the girl as he held her against his bent knee, and by the droop of her head as it bent toward his encircling arm, he knew that she had fainted. He went on talking to himself.

"Oh, Lord! Gotta do something about this. Come away from that edge, horse. You get out of my way, you fool runaway, you."

GENTLY, and with care that the spot selected should be reasonably free of sagebrush roots, sharp stones, and rattlesnakes, he laid the unconscious girl on the ground. It was while he was trying to decide, out of a singular ignorance of fainting spells, whether her head should be raised or lowered, and whether one was supposed to pour water on the victim out of a bucket or administer it carefully from a spoon, that she sighed and opened her eyes.

"Where—" she began, and saw Firefly. Evidently, knowledge of the end of her adventure now came to her for the first time. She reached for Jack's hand as an aid to rising; and, on her feet, retained it.

"I—" she began; but the change of position had been too much for her. She swayed, tottered, flung up her other hand as though to ward off the surging darkness, and would have fallen had not Jack, for the second time, thrown his arm about her. For a moment, she leaned against him, her head on his shoulder, the perfume of her hair in his nostrils.

"Miss!" said Foster urgently. "Are you hurt?"

Alice Holton raised her head and looked at him. It was a brief look, lasting perhaps two seconds. Of it, no more need be said than that Jack Foster noted the remarkable resemblance between the girl's mouth and one of

those bows which little boys with no clothes on carry in paintings; and saw that her eyes, instead of being brown, were of a singularly deep blue color. He wondered why he had never observed these characteristics before, and why he should suddenly have noticed them now. The blackbird could have told him.

"What use is there," said the girl, looking down at the toes of her riding boots, "in my trying to thank you?"

Jack Foster had come quite nicely through that part of the business which involved violent action, with his breathing apparatus by no means deranged. Now that it was all over—at this very moment, in fact—he felt his heart begin to beat rapidly, and his lungs contract until he breathed with a peculiar difficulty. The blackbird could have explained this also; but he was miles away, having a dust bath and thinking constructively about lunch.

"It wasn't anything at all, miss. "Only—"

What was he going on talking for, Foster asked himself savagely? He had nothing to say.

"Only?" asked the girl, looking up into his face.

Her eyes, it was to be noticed, had more to them than mere blueness. They seemed soft and very deep. For a moment, they seemed to engulf Jack Foster.

Like Firefly on the edge of the ravine, he felt himself slipping, slipping; made a desperate effort and was himself again—almost. He was not in the least aware that he had flung down Alice Holton's hand as if it were a hot coal, and with sufficient force to make her step back a little way.

"Only I hope it 'll teach you, miss," he said in a strange, strained voice, "to

take advice when it's a question of horses."

HE wanted to turn his back with these words. He knew that the blue eyes were going to look hurt, and he didn't want to see them. He wanted to get his pony and go for a long ride, as fast and far away as possible. Yet he did not move; and when the eyes unexpectedly filled with tears, he could do no more than stare at them as though hypnotized.

"Oh—all right," said Alice Holton. "Shall we be starting back?"

She replied to his question that she was perfectly able to ride; and as for Firefly, it was obvious from the angle of his once proud neck, and his nuzzling proximity to Foster's horse, that he was thoroughly ashamed of himself, and humbly desirous of being admitted once more to respectable equine society. Nevertheless, it was Jack who mounted him, after helping Alice to the saddle of his own horse.

In a silence which endured for a full mile, and contrasted strangely with the joyous noisiness of every other living thing in the landscape, the girl and the man started back toward the WH.

It was Foster who spoke first. The blackbird would have flapped his wings in horror at his words, but he was away, visiting the other bank of the Rio Grande on urgent personal affairs; and anyhow, he might have hesitated about offering advice to man, the self-styled wisest of creatures.

"Miss."

"Yes?"

There was that in the sudden turn of Alice's head, and the bright smile with which she rewarded this apparent advance toward friendliness, which half-stopped the words in Jack Foster's throat. But he thought of an after-

noon in New York City in 1918; brought before his mind's eye the vision of a girl laughing—laughing at him; and went desperately forward.

"Miss," he said. "I don't want—I don't want to presume on this thing today. I—don't want to make any capital of it."

Alice Holton looked toward the horizon. Her face was turned from Foster, so that he could not see the sudden quiver of her lips.

"Do you believe I thought you did?" she asked quietly.

"No, but—but honest, miss, if you could forget about it, just the same as if it had never happened—"

The girl looked at him calmly.

"It's not quite so easy to forget being saved from a death like that," she said. "One has one's natural feelings; unless one happens to be a very exceptional *man*. Don't you think so?"

"I'm not an exceptional man, miss. It's just that—"

Others of Jack Foster's functions seemed to have joined in the general derangement. Now, though he felt cold to the heels of his boots, he found himself perspiring slightly just under the brim of the hat. Also, he seemed to have lost the power of thinking clearly enough to put his ideas into intelligible words.

"Well?" asked Alice.

THE dam broke in a flood.

"I've been through hell once," said Jack Foster hotly, "an' I ain't goin' into it no more! I don't want to—all I want is to be left alone, an'—an'—"

"You don't want to be annoyed with my gratitude?"

The words which, on the human plane, were the equivalent of the scream of a tortured horse, died on

Jack's lips. Cooled by the ice of the girl's voice, he saw himself as he appeared to her: an ungracious boor, refusing a friendship which she had not offered.

"I—" he began dazedly.

"Don't be afraid," said Alice, her eyes blazing. "I'll respect your independence. Good-by."

She had no spurs, but the sides of the horse she was riding were sore enough to receive great stimulation from the bare heels of the boots she now drove against them. The pony was off like an arrow; Firefly, his recently implanted fear of speed being proof even against the urgings of his rider, jogging after him at a pace which no spurring could raise above a canter.

Alice was a hundred yards in the lead when she disappeared over the next rise of ground; the following valley, a good two hundred across, showed no sign of her; and by the time Jack topped the final knoll, she was already at the ranch house, half a mile away. He could see her, Jed at her stirrup, dismounting; it seemed to him that for a moment she turned her face toward him.

But then she turned her back and seemed to be greeting a man who had just dismounted from a tall, English-looking horse that stood by the veranda as yet unhitched. A man in a black coat, white riding breeches, and a dude's hat.

Old Jed, his extended forefinger visible as the distance decreased, seemed to be putting up some kind of argument. It must be that lawyer fellow, Carteret; to think he'd have the gall to visit here!

"Come up, you brute!" said Foster through his teeth; and, five minutes later, he dismounted at Jedediah's side. Alice, her eyes on Mr. Carteret to the pointed exclusion of all else, was op-

posite him; the well-dressed lawyer, paler than usual, and with a look of fury in the black eyes, on his right.

Jedediah, on his left, was now silent. He had said his say, and virtue had departed from him. He looked older than usual, and his wrinkled face was gray.

"I can only say—" began Carteret.

"You say nothin'!" growled Jedediah menacingly. "If the fool you made sheriff isn't up to his work, there's—"

"Will you be *quiet*?" said Alice Holton, with unaccustomed anger. For a moment, her eyes left the lawyer and flickered to the face of Jack Foster. Something in the set of his face as he stared at Mr. Carteret seemed to decide her. "Mr. Carteret, I am sorry that this should have happened."

"I simply dropped around," protested the lawyer, "to express my regret at the mistake which put me in the position of disputing your right to inherit—"

THE girl winced. Allusion to the death of her father still struck a tender spot; the more sensitive now for Jed Wilks's blunt accusations of a moment before. Looking at the dark-faced, well-dressed, well-educated man before her, she did not for a moment believe the charges which Wilks had hurled at her visitor; she saw him as, perhaps, the legal adviser of whatever group it was that wanted to buy the WH.

She absolved him—as women will, on appearance—from any participation in that group's criminal activities, if there were any; which, because of her having been shielded from even talk of violence, she scarcely believed. On the other hand, and for several reasons, she would have deeply preferred to be

alone; but tradition triumphed. Come death, heartbreak, or ruin, hospitality must be maintained.

"You must be tired after your ride," said the girl gravely, "and—after this." Once more her glance flashed, not at the guilty Jedediah, but at Jack. She looked away as his eyes turned, startled, toward her. "I shall be very glad if you'll come into the house. Perhaps you would like something to drink?"

Suddenly she turned to Foster.

"Will you see to—"

She had been going to treat him as he asked to be treated, as an ordinary paid hand of the ranch; she had been going to ask him to take Lawyer Carteret's horse. Now, suddenly, she found the project too great for her re-

sources. Lowering her eyes before the steel glint of her rescuer's, she tried to turn the commission over to Wilks; then, helplessly, changed the form of her request.

"Will you send some one to see to the horse?"

Wilks made no answer.

"I can't stay more than a minute," said Mr. Carteret nervously. "I—must be getting back."

But he did stay more than a minute.

Not only that, but, reassured by the lack of sudden death on his first visit, he returned; he continued to visit at the WH, staying longer, it seemed, each time. And—which made Jed Wilks writhe with impotent fury—Alice Holton made no move to discourage him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



These Southerners Never Surrendered

COFFEE drinkers who enjoy the flavor of Brazilian coffee probably never guess that the beans from which their cup was brewed may have been grown and shipped by some expatriated Southerner.

Yet one of the most prosperous settlements of the Sao Paulo province of Brazil is occupied by descendants of Alabama and Georgia citizens. Their town, one hundred miles north of Sao Paulo, is called Villa Americana, or American Village, and they are as much Brazilian citizens as their Portuguese neighbors, although they are American in appearance and habits.

Soon after the end of the Civil War a band of persons numbering three hundred and sixty-five men, women and children left the South to avoid the hardship and oppressions of the reconstruction days and to avoid taking the oath of allegiance to the Union. One of their two ships was wrecked off Cuba, so the other was filled with the entire load of emigrants. Some of them had intended going to Mexico, but the disturbances following the execution of Maximilian caused them to unite on Brazil.

On April 22, 1867, they landed at Rio de Janeiro, where they were welcomed and given a large tract of land free. But it proved to be located in a malarial section, so they removed to the spot where their descendants now live. Here the elevation is three thousand feet. The summers are not hot, and there are no winter frosts so near the Equator.

At first they raised cane, cotton and tobacco as in their native South, but of late they have been growing coffee.

George Parke.



*The door moved inward inch by inch, slowly,
as cold death creeps upon a man.*

Storm and Steel

*Jules Larocque would battle the blizzard with gay courage ; but he had worse
foes to contend with, in this desperate affair of the Northern bush*

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

THE wind tore at Jules Larocque, as with teeth. It was like a wolf pack trying to pull him down. This past half hour he had come to that stage in his battle with the blizzard when he did not know whether he was to live. The wound in his shoulder had weakened him and he would not be able to keep on his feet until dawn, when the storm might break. Only *le bon Dieu* could save him now.

Larocque was not yet ready to die. Near to exhaustion, with the cold creeping toward that numbness beyond pain which means death, still he fought on through a black night of chaos. But even if he were able to march all night there would be no hope of reaching Sainte Martine in the morning. He had to fight wind and stinging snow pellets for each foot of progress.

The end must come soon. The great strength of his youth had been drained

by this night, after a day of steady marching, and by the bullet that had slashed the muscles of his shoulder. Already he had lost his rifle. He would have thrown away his pack but that the tump-line was frozen to the knitted *tuque* upon his forehead and the shoulder-straps were ice-bound to the rough cloth of his jacket. Each pound of weight had become a deadly burden.

Larocque could not understand that shot from Caron's stone house on the Ruisseau LeBlanc. It was the place where travelers between Paspébiac and Sainte Martine spent the night, and Jules had counted on the waddling Zoël Caron to give him shelter. But for that assurance Larocque would never have set out from Paspébiac with the threat of a blizzard brooding over the bush.

Why had Zoël Caron blocked the doorway with his huge carcass, telling Jules that there was no room that night? It was contrary to the unwritten law of the bush to refuse food and shelter. A man could sleep on the floor and eat from his own pack even if there were no spoonful of soup to spare in that house. Unheard of, such a refusal!

Over the shoulder of Caron, Jules had seen the long-nosed Lucas Ploudre; stooping, as always, with the look of a fox in his eyes. It was he who had fired when Jules argued for the privilege of at least half an hour in the warmth of the kitchen. Without a word of warning he had thrust a rifle past the fat ribs of Zoël and sent a bullet tearing across the shoulder of Larocque.

Jules had stumbled back into the gathering darkness, astounded, instinctively taking cover beyond a corner of the house. He had been glad to head into the bush even though the

sky was then a dark bowl of gray, and the wind was screaming across the open places. Better the mercy of the night than the scant mercy of the Caron house.

He knew those two, Caron and Ploudre, for what they were. A man had to be careful how much he drank there, and Larocque always slept with his wallet in his sock when he stayed overnight at the Ruisseau LeBlanc. But what quarrel had they with him? He could remember none.

The gross Caron and the slinking Ploudre faded now before the vision of death. By the weight of his own legs, Larocque knew that his life was measured in yards. Again and again he had fallen, tripping over the tops of bushes that rose above the six-foot layer of snow. He had bumped into trees in the blackness, and had gone down.

Each time he had righted himself, found his snowshoes, and gone on; swaying against a wind that was like a wall. But now he knew that he would no longer have the strength to get his legs under him. He would go down, he would try to get up, he would fall again and settle into the snow. Perhaps next summer some one would find a heap of tattered cloth between Ruisseau LeBlanc and Sainte Martine.

HE tried to say an *Ave*, but he could not remember, either in Latin or French. Too far gone! *Eh bien!* Perhaps it would not matter. At least he had injured no man and he had always followed his considerable nose, straight to the front, in affairs both great and small. *Le bon Dieu* would know that, naturally. That, in fact, was why Jules kept going now, straight ahead to the end. It would have been much easier to lie down.

His lowered head hit something which was not a tree; something which yielded and let him go sprawling forward with outflung arms. But not into the snow. There was a surface beneath him; a hard surface upon which the rims of his snowshoes clattered and banged as he fell.

It was a matter of minutes before Jules could pull himself up, even with that comforting solidity underneath. He knew that if he had fallen in the snow he would never have been able to get to his feet. This would have been the last fall. At length he sat up. Blackness inclosed him. With feeble jerks he pulled off a mitten and felt about.

His numbed fingers met a floor of planks, snow-powdered. Now he knew. It was the door of a cabin that his head had met, and he was sitting under a roof with perhaps a stove or a fireplace waiting. The wind-driven snow no longer blinded him; log walls kept off the blows of the storm. A great rejoicing filled the heart of Larocque. Had he not felt, for the past hour, that *le bon Dieu* would not fail a man who marched straight to the front?

Jules kicked off his snowshoes; then he found the door and closed it. It was no easy task to work off his pack, with fingers like sticks of wood, and open it in the darkness. But he managed it, and found candles and matches.

The light burned up and revealed a little cabin like hundreds of others in the bush. It was abandoned, at least for this year, and only the empty bunks and the rusty sheet-iron stove remained. But there was dry wood ready to burn, for it is the law of the bush that a man shall leave as much as he burns when he uses an empty cabin.

In fifteen minutes a good fire had

driven back the cold; the light of two candles glowed against the log walls, and the blankets of Jules were spread in one of the bunks. He was getting warm again, and hungry, and eager to smoke. His wound had stopped bleeding, he found. After all, this country of Canada was the place for a man.

It was as Jules lighted his pipe, drawing deep the first puffs, that he noticed the door. It moved. That might be the wind, but it was not. Wind moves a door back and forth; thrusts it open and perhaps shuts it again with violence. This door moved inward inch by inch, slowly, as cold death creeps upon a man in the bush.

At the back of the neck of Jules Larocque there was a strange feeling. Man or beast he would fight, but there was no man who belonged to this cabin, and no wolf or panther would be abroad this night. The door opened inches more. A dim, gray-white shape appeared and vanished. Jules remembered the *loup-garou*, that dread man in beast form who must have his blood shed by the hand of man in order to be released from bondage.

"*Bon Dieu!*" muttered Larocque. He drew his knife, the only weapon left to him since he had lost his rifle. In all his twenty-five years he had never been so scared. But it is necessary that a man should go straight ahead.

Jules called upon unwilling legs and flung himself across the room. He hurled the door back, to bang against the logs, and crouched to thrust upward with his knife.

But the *loup-garou* did not leap for his throat, and there was no need for that knife thrust. A snow-crustled form, on hands and knees in the doorway, tumbled into the room. Larocque cried out and dragged the helpless one

farther toward the fire, then shut the door.

A BOY, he thought at the first glance. But as soon as he had opened the jacket and brushed snow away from face and hair, he saw that this was a girl in trousers and boots. More than that; it was a girl to make a man's heart pound. The delicate oval of her face lay in the crook of his arm. With clumsy gentleness he worked off the little fur *casque*, frozen to her hair. Fine and soft as silk, the black hair rippled over his hands. Of course her eyes would be of the blue of heaven! Was she not a beautiful French-Canadian?

After the first hurried rubbing of face and hands and feet against frost-bite, Jules began to wonder. Where had she come from? He examined her snowshoes. They told him nothing. Perhaps she was the daughter of a chopper or trapper, who had wandered in the storm. But any girl bred to the bush would know better than to go out in a blizzard, unless she were pressed by life and death necessity.

She stirred and muttered. Jules drew woolen socks back over her slender little feet and laid her in the bunk he had made ready for himself. What feet! *Ciel!* What more could a man ask than that a girl have feet like that? He wondered what she would think of a young woodcutter like Jules Larocque.

The lids lifted suddenly. Yes; her eyes were blue. Jules tried to push his tangled brown hair into some semblance of order. He smiled; and knew that he grew red under the brown of many winds. But he stopped instantly in his progress toward the bunk, when he saw a strange blue fire burning in those so adorable eyes.

"*Mademoiselle* is not badly frost-bitten," he said, trying to think of something that would give her comfort in this moment of awakening. "Not at all. I have rubbed snow—"

She sat up so quickly that he stopped speaking. She looked at him, around the cabin.

"I am trying to remember—the last of it was—"

"The blizzard had nearly finished you," Jules told her. "And me, also! I was close to the end when I found this place! The good God led the feet of both of us to-night, *mademoiselle!*"

"Ah, yes!" Her face cleared of bewilderment only to become clouded as though by suffering. "You must have pulled me in. I have to thank you, *monsieur.*"

"For nothing! You fell against the door. But now you must eat. Look! I am melting snow for tea. In my pack there is bread and good *graisse de rôti* to spread on it. When we have eaten, it will be as though nothing had happened!"

"As though nothing had happened?" she cried, with a shudder. For a moment her little hands covered her face. When she took them away she was outwardly calm again, but she regarded Larocque with a strangely speculative light in her eyes. She shrugged. "It matters not, *monsieur!*"

Jules Larocque was curious, but he was far too well-mannered to ask questions when it was apparent that this little sister of the angels did not wish to explain herself. He dropped a handful of tea into the pannikin on the stove and brought from his pack a long, crusty loaf. The *graisse de rôti*, that delicious grease which is left from the roasting of pork, he set beside the bread. He took his hunting knife and cut thick slices of bread, holding the

leaf firmly against his chest like the father of a family. Then Jules dropped the knife, point down, so that it stood upright on the table where they could both use it.

"Supper is served, *mademoiselle*," he announced with a flourish. "It is going to be the most enjoyable meal of my life!"

SHE ignored that, and as she rose slowly from the bunk she asked a question:

"Where did you come from?"

"Me? I came from Paspébiac and I am going to Sainte Martine. My name, *mademoiselle*, is Jules Larocque."

"Ah!" It was as though he had said: "I am the devil!" for a dark and bitter look swept her face. "I wonder, *monsieur*, that you did not stop at Ruisseau LeBlanc for the night!"

"I tried to!" Jules, uncomfortable and puzzled, spread out his hands. "They said they had no room for me."

"A strange story, *monsieur*!" Her voice trembled with some emotion Larocque could not understand. He did not know what to say, so he kept silent as they sat down opposite each other at the table. Should he tell her of the shot that had been fired at him? No; for then she certainly would not believe him. He was greatly troubled.

The knife trembled in the girl's hand as she spread a slice of bread. That might be accounted for by her experience in the blizzard, but Larocque felt sure it was due to the mysterious emotion which burned in her cheeks and blazed in her eyes when she looked at him.

They ate as do those who have great hunger, but Jules saw, delightedly, that there was a daintiness about this girl

of the bush which remained even here in the cabin of a chopper. Her fingers were swollen with frostbite, and little stinging spots had appeared upon her face, but she did not complain.

She spoke no more to him with her lips, but each time that her glance clashed with his, it seared him like a blue flame. Larocque was crushed, bewildered. She had not told him her name. If she left him like that when morning came, he might never see her again. What had he done? Name of a dog! He would march all night through another blizzard for a pleasant word from her! He must say something.

"In the morning," he began, with a smile, "we'll be able to march again, no doubt. We cannot be far from Sainte Martine, if that is where *mademoiselle* wishes to go."

They had finished eating. Without replying she looked him steadily in the face and there was something in the depths of her eyes that actually scared Larocque. Slowly she rose and turned the corner of the little table; she came so close to Jules that he could have touched her merely by lifting his arm. Her hand reached toward the knife, hesitated, and then swept it up. She drove the point straight at the heart of Larocque.

Not even when she reached for the knife had Jules expected an attack. To think of a girl like this trying to kill a man was an absurdity. Jules had sat fascinated, bewildered, and he was late in his movement of defense. The steel went through his heavy shirts and cut his skin before his fingers closed around the small wrist and for the moment held it motionless.

Larocque, now fairly dazed by astonishment, had no doubt that his grasp upon her wrist would be enough

to end the matter. For an instant they remained like that, while she blazed hatred. Then she became a fighting wildcat.

Jules staggered to his feet and was borne backward to the wall of the cabin by the fury of her attack. He was a man of good stature, trained down to bone and muscle by his life in the bush, but it took all there was in him to meet the rage of this little handful of girl. There was something in it that was greater than mere physical strength. It seemed that the powers of darkness lent themselves to her little round arms.

The knife was the center of her desire. She wanted to sink the steel into Jules Larocque; and to that end she used teeth and nails and wrenched against his grip until he felt the tender flesh break under his fingers. Interminable minutes passed before he could crush her to him, with one arm around her small, warm body. He pressed her face against his chest and she tried to bite through his shirt.

AS gently as he could, Larocque opened the stubborn fingers, and the knife fell to the floor. Then he lifted the girl, still struggling, and flung her down upon the blankets of the bunk. He had thought that would be enough. But instantly she curled up like a panther and sprang at him. He was obliged to sit on the edge of the bunk and pin her shoulders down. Then the delectable lips quivered and slow tears rolled down her flushed cheeks. She went limp, sobbing.

Jules Larocque, bending above the grief-stricken face, knew that he loved her. He did not want to take his hands away from the rounded shoulders, quivering to the storm of her sobs.

Rather would he have lifted her like a child and held her close; smoothing her hair, speaking low words of comfort. That she had tried to kill him made no difference. The power that is not to be described had bound him as with chains.

The storm died away. Again she stared at him, conquered but still hating. Her gaze was dark with it, but there was no longer that light which he knew now had been the intent to kill. For the present, at least, she had given up.

"Take your hands away from me!" she exclaimed.

"*Mademoiselle*," he said, as he straightened up, "will you tell me who you are? Why you want to kill me?"

"I am Madelon Desbiens!" she cried. "Daughter of Octave Desbiens! Now do you know why I want to kill you? Monster!"

"*Bon Dieu!*" muttered Jules, rubbing his forehead. "I know nothing except that Madelon is the most beautiful name in the world and—and that I love you! Name of heaven! What a wife you will make!"

"Wife? To you? Animal! I would die first!"

"But—"

"Either you will kill me or I shall see you dead before I have finished with you! Do you think you are going to get away? You cannot go so deep into the bush that I shall not follow you! Ah, you did not fool me long after I found you here. Larocque! You told me your name! *Imbécile!*"

"I," said Jules, with conviction, "am mad! But yes, completely *fou!*"

"Truly? As the fox is mad!"

"But, Madelon, if I cannot marry you I shall be glad to die by your hand! That, as least, will be some little attention from you!"

She began to sob again; she hid her face from him. Never before had Jules Larocque been so miserable and so happy. Without much success he tried to think. There was a mistake somewhere—he could have held both of her little feet in one hand—he wanted to kiss the tiny eartip that showed under that rippling black hair.

"Madelon—"

The door of the cabin burst open. In a swirling gust of wind and snow two men stumbled out of the night. One turned and slammed the door while the other, dashing snow from his eyes, leveled a rifle at the bunk. This one was Lucas Ploudre. Larocque knew because that other human bulk was of the shape of Zoël Caron, and they would be together. The faces of both men were covered with snow and ice, but there was no other form in that country quite so broad and round and short-legged as that of Caron.

THE girl saw them. She gathered herself and leaped past Jules.

One hand pointed dramatically at him as she faced Ploudre and Caron.

"Shoot him, *messieurs!*" she pleaded. "I beg of you!"

"Softly, my little one!" replied Caron, as he clawed the snow away from his face. "There will be some shooting, I have no doubt."

Larocque had recovered from his confusion at the first appearance of these two. His knife lay on the floor, just under the edge of the table. His rifle was buried in the snow somewhere between this cabin and Ruisseau LeBlanc. Caron and Ploudre each carried a rifle, and certainly each had a knife. Was it that the whole world was in a conspiracy to murder Jules Larocque? But why? He considered the muzzle of the rifle of Lucas

Ploudre. It was pointed at his stomach and it remained steady. One could not miss at that distance.

The men of Ruisseau LeBlanc cleared themselves of snow as well as they could and sat down at the table, but always with the rifle of Ploudre bearing upon the bunk. Madelon went to a bench near the door, as though to make sure that the prisoner did not escape if he should prefer the blizzard to a bullet.

It was clear that Caron and Ploudre were in no hurry. The fat jowls of Caron, red and bristling with a week's whiskers, hung over the collar of his shirt. Lucas, long-nosed, chinless, regarded Larocque with a vicious, mottled eye.

"*Messieurs,*" said Jules, at length, "you have shot me once to-night. Is not that enough?"

"A prayer will do you more good than a joke," grunted Caron.

Jules Larocque could see very little hope for himself. He knew that Ploudre was quite capable of killing a man if he thought he would not be found out. Caron, if he lacked that much resolution, would at least approve. Jules saw nothing ahead but a chance to die on his feet, fighting. He could that.

"Madelon," he said, slowly, turning to the girl, "it appears that I am about to die. Will you tell me why you want me killed?"

For many seconds she looked into his face. It seemed now that she was comparing him and those others, and that her purpose was weakening. Her eyes grew bright with tears; she wrung her hands and a moan escaped her.

"Oh!" she cried. "There must be some mistake! Perhaps—perhaps it was an accident that you shot my father!"

"Shot your father?" echoed Jules. His head felt as though it were a top, spinning on his shoulders. "Madelon, I never saw your father! What do you mean?"

"You told me you were at Ruisseau LeBlanc!" Shaken and uncertain of the truth, she let loose a torrent of words. "I heard a shot and ran downstairs. There was another shot. My father lay dead on the floor. They told me, those two, that a man named Jules Larocque had done it. They said you had tried to rob him, and that they drove you out and shot at you. It was known that my father was going into the bush to buy wood, and that he carried much money! *Mon Dieu!* Have they lied to me? It all happened so swiftly that I believed them. That is why I followed you into the bush."

Her gaze swung from face to face. The answer to the mystery that had puzzled Larocque lay in the grin of Zoël Caron, in the sneer of Ploudre.

SO you two murdered Desbiens for his money!" said Jules.

"And I came to the door just in time to help you turn away the suspicions of *mademoiselle!* It was well thought of, *messieurs*, but you did not count on the spirit of the girl!"

"Forgive me, Jules," said Madelon, brokenly. "I have brought this on you. They've followed me because I have the money."

"It wasn't on the old man so you must have it, my little one," said Caron. His eyes, set like currants in a fat bun, gleamed as he looked at her. "You left in a hurry!"

Slowly the girl drew forth from the bosom of her dress a flat packet, wrapped in oiled silk.

"*Messieurs*," she said, "here is the money. Two thousand dollars. I will

give it to you, all of it, if you will let Jules Larocque go free!"

Caron chuckled. Lucas Ploudre permitted a mouth corner to twitch in amusement.

"It's ours now, anyway. As for Larocque, he knows too much. It's bad for him that you followed."

"Then you will kill me, too!" she cried, springing up.

Jules Larocque was happy, even though death might be less than five minutes away. Madelon's tiny clenched fists, her flaming face and throat, the swift glance she gave him, all proclaimed that she loved him.

"You'll be kissed, not killed!" grinned Caron. "I want you!"

"You fat fool!" cried Lucas. "She'll hang us if she can!"

They glared at each other. That instant in which their attention was turned from him, gave Jules an opportunity to make the first move toward carrying out a plan which had sprung, full formed into his mind. One of the candles was guttering out. He caught the eye of Madelon, nodded toward the remaining candle, and silently shaped his lips as though to blow it out. She understood.

Ploudre was watching him again. He fingered the trigger of his rifle.

"I'll have the girl!" insisted Caron, with a growl. Perhaps he thought he had won a victory. Ploudre rolled an eye at him without speaking, and Larocque felt certain that Lucas Ploudre intended to shoot both him and Madelon regardless of what Caron said. He might even add the fat Zoël to the victims and take all the spoil for himself.

The wick of the guttering candle sank down into the grease and went out. The other was in a wooden holder on the wall, not more than a

yard from where Madelon stood. Lucas threw open the chamber of his rifle to make sure that there was a cartridge ready. He closed it and drew back the hammer.

Jules looked steadily at him, sitting motionless with his hands braced against the edge of the bunk. He could see, out of the corner of his eye, that Madelon was poised to step forward and with one movement plunge the cabin into darkness. She must not wait too long.

Every muscle in the body of Larocque was taut. He found himself swaying with her, ever so slightly. He dared not look full at her for fear Ploudre would understand what was going to happen. Caron, always stupid, was watching Lucas, fascinated by the doing of something for which he himself would not have had the courage.

PLOUDRE raised his rifle and took aim. At that instant the cabin became dark.

As the light went out Jules flung himself to the floor, on hands and knees. The rifle cracked, filling the small room with sound. A curse bit through the darkness. Then came a scuffling of feet. A bench went over. Suddenly a lance of flame struck out from the neighborhood of the table. Then there was the thud of a solid blow and the voice of Lucas Ploudre.

"Put down that rifle, *imbécile*, or I'll kill you! You fired within an inch of my nose! We've got to get him with our knives!"

Jules, crawling across the floor toward the spot where he had seen his own knife lying, drew a breath of relief. If they fought with knives Madelon would be safe for the present.

His groping fingers searched for the knife. Before the light went out he

had fixed its position in his mind, but either he had swung off his course in the darkness or the shuffling feet of Ploudre and Caron had kicked it away. His fingers crawled over the rough planks in vain.

At his right there was the sound of a stealthy movement. That would be Lucas. Jules shivered. If Ploudre had heard him he might expect six inches of steel in his back. He forced himself to remain motionless. The next movement that he made must be to attack. His only hope was to carry the fight to Ploudre.

Larocque crouched, ready. Faintly another step sounded, and Lucas was so near that Jules could smell the oiled leather of his boots. Now, was the moment, before Ploudre stumbled over him and struck downward with his knife.

Jules flung out his arms and found the legs of the enemy. Then he rose up, calling upon back and thighs for all the strength that was in them. Before Lucas Ploudre could use the knife, he was swung through the air and went over the shoulder of Larocque. He struck with a crash that made the little cabin tremble.

At the same instant a scream turned Jules cold; it sapped his strength so that his knees could hardly bear him up. Madelon! She was in the hands of gross Zoël Caron, over there in the darkness, and he was powerless to help her. Jules tried to shut his mind to the thought; he tried to breathe a prayer.

All this in a little fraction of a second. He was on top of Ploudre before the man could gather himself. Jules felt a streak of fire along his arm, and then he found the wrist of the knife hand and twisted it until the weapon dropped. With the ring of the steel on the floor, Larocque thought he

heard victory, but he reckoned without knowing what manner of man he fought.

Lucas Ploudre himself was steel. A long, ungainly man, unimpressive to the eye, he was not only of the weathered and toughened fiber of the bush, but he knew every vicious trick of rough-and-tumble fighting. Now he drove a knee upward and broke the hold upon his wrist. A wave of sickness swept over Larocque and he saved himself only by falling into the arms of Ploudre, and into a back-breaking lock that made him dizzy with pain.

They rolled across the floor. Benches fell. The stove came clattering down. Jules, already weakened by two wounds, found himself in the hardest battle of his life. They used elbows and knees and fists; and at every opportunity, Ploudre tried to gouge and bite. Both weakened, but Jules began to realize that for him the end was near.

AS they fought a sound that was not of their making forced itself into the consciousness of Larocque. It came regularly from a corner of the cabin; came with the rhythm of breathing and the weight of an agony too deep for outcry. Every time there was a respite in the battle that choked moan reached the ears of Jules. Madelon! He thought of the things he would do to Caron if he could dispose of Ploudre. The thought gave him courage, but it did not renew his strength.

Then when it seemed that each blow, each mighty thrust of his muscles must be the last, he found hope again. He pulled a gouging thumb away from his eye and with a desperate wrench twisted that thumb and hand until every joint and tendon in

Ploudre's arm was strained to the breaking point. Ploudre filled the cabin with a shriek. Larocque knew that he had won the fight. The murderer of Octave Desbiens could not stand pain.

A bone snapped. Ploudre fainted and Jules staggered to his feet. He lighted a match and found the candle that Madelon had blown out. Let Zoël Caron shoot if he could get to a rifle first! Jules was exalted by a great wrath. He felt that it was impossible for him to die until he had avenged Madelon; and after that he did not care. So it was with movements almost of deliberation that he picked up the knife of Ploudre and forced himself to turn and look at the corner from which that moaning still came.

The face of Madelon, drained of color, was lifted to him. She knelt, in what seemed, a strange fashion. Jules stared. A smile broke over her white face.

"Help me, my Jules," she said, wearily. "I am tired of choking this enormous pork."

Larocque went to her. She was kneeling upon the broad back of Zoël Caron, who lay with his face to the floor. As he breathed he emitted those soul-shaking moans. Around his neck was his own belt. The small hands of Madelon held the two ends of it crossed at the back of his neck and, as Jules well knew, there was strength in those hands.

"When he caught me I was scared, and I screamed," she confessed. "Then I whispered to him that I much preferred a man of stature to a slender child like you. The rest was easy. While he hugged me I slipped off his belt and when I put my arms around his neck I made a necktie for him! I hope you will not be jealous, my Jules."

THE END.



They stood for a moment, transfixed

The Snow Girl

Riding the wings of the terrible Antarctic blizzards she controls, Naina strives to conquer America's polar outposts—and only her captives, Welch and Dragon, stand in the way

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Princess of the Atom," "The Shadow Girl," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE WELCH, who is telling the story, is radio man at the Trans-polar air line's station a few hundred miles from the South Pole, in 1960. He and David Dragon go out in a blizzard to hunt for a special War Department plane.

They are seized by Antarctic bandits armed with a strange blue light-ray and taken, with Helga Johnson, from the wrecked plane to the distant village of the bandits.

The bandits are renegades who had been assembled by the "White Chief-tain," one Roberts, who had passed on his hatred of the United States to his daughter Naina. Upon his death she succeeded to the rule over the bandits and a thousand more Antarctic natives

With her blue ray, which creates terrible "blue blizzards," she plans to wipe out the American polar colonies, such as Byrd's Little America.

This story began in the *Argosy* for November 2.

At the city inside the cliff Helga finds her lost father, inventor of the blue ray, who had been captured from an exploring party by Naina's father.

Ramón Margones, a Chilean pirate who is secretly seeking the gold in the mountains of Antarctica, takes Joe and David Dragon before the ruler, Naina, a beautiful but cruel and seemingly inhuman girl of twenty.

She has Joe dropped on the settlement of Little America, with orders to signal, by dimming all lights at nine the following night, that they will evacuate the post immediately. At that time she, accompanied by David, circles over the doomed city, their plane hidden by an artificial storm. The city is defiant.

CHAPTER X (*Continued*).

THE BLUE BLIZZARD.

GOVERNOR BLAND, his secretary Rankin, and I sat in the tower of the Little America Administration Building. The little city stretched before us, white streets packed high with snow, gleaming with shafts of yellow that slanted out from the windows of the low houses. The Plaza was near by; with its storage buildings and its little church half buried in the drift, and only the spire and the cross showing. Behind it, at the edge of the town, the gray-black gash of the glacier and the Overland Trail winding southward were visible. It all lay wan and serene in the starlight.

Bland said, "A blizzard can't do much to us here. The danger is in the north, where they are unprepared for it."

A blue blizzard! These low dome-roofed houses were built to withstand every hostile threat of nature that the

grim Antarctic could fling against them. There was no real danger here. These people of Little America were accustomed to blizzards. There could be no panic. An inconvenience, that is all. But my heart was pounding nevertheless as the hour Naina had designated approached.

"She'll come from the south, won't she?" Rankin questioned.

I shrugged. "I suppose so."

The stars off to the south bathed the snow and the ramp beside the glacier with their silver sheen. We searched there with our gaze, but nothing showed.

The news of this bandit threat had been kept fairly quiet. The city this evening was busy with its normal activities. These were few indeed throughout the long polar night. The streets now were practically deserted. A line of dogs drawing a sled came down the main street returning from having delivered supplies to the nearest trail station.

A few men loitered at the corner of the Plaza, round, gray figures in their heavy polar furs. I noticed that they were gazing into the southern stars.

Nothing showed. And then we thought we saw a speck off there. A plane? It may have been.

Rankin said, "We should have sent Franck up with a plane to meet her and scare her off."

But the governor shook his head. Bland was too experienced a fighter to trifle with the unknown.

The little speck off there in the southern stars widened. Then we saw that it was not a plane, but a small, conical cloud materializing over the glacier, far up; a small, gray-white cloud hanging there in the starlight. We stared at it silently.

Five minutes passed.

Bland said, "It's almost nine o'clock."

A leaden cloud mass was up there now. It spread over the city, hanging low, obscuring the stars. Through it a tiny stab of blue was flickering, like the heat lightning of a summer thunderstorm—a mad enough thought down here in the Antarctic.

Another five minutes.

Bland snapped his watch shut.

"Well," he said, "she knows now that the United States won't surrender to a bandit."

We waited, breathless.

IN the Plaza the sled stood with its neglected dogs tangling the harness and its drivers standing staring. The blue lightning had gone from the cloud, but now it came again. The cloud darkened. A wave of white swirling fog rolled down from it—heavy vapor boiling and swirling like steam as it struck the warm air over the city. Warm air? The outdoor temperature this night was about minus 42° F.

It was insufferably hot in the Administration Building tower. Then came the wind. A roaring wind at first, we could hear it sighing around the caves—a whine. But there was a threat to it. And presently it swung and came the other way with a snarl. A blast shook our tower in a sudden explosive puff.

Rankin exclaimed, "That was—"

It was gone at once. We could feel the chill of it even through the double panes. Down in the Plaza the harnessed dogs were frightened. We saw the men standing there make a sudden run, one way and then another. Lashing the dogs, they mounted the sleigh and vanished down a side street. A swirl of dissipating vapor had come

down from the cloud and touched them with its deadly breath. I do not know what the temperature of that white mist may have been; they say now that it can be near minus 200° F. The men said afterward that a mere whiff of it had touched them—an icy touch that burned like fire.

Then came the snow, a solid slanting sheet of tremendous soft white flakes, abnormally, unnaturally large. The wind was from the south. The snow obscured the city lights. It whirled and sucked through the deserted streets; the street lights showed dimly through its white murk.

Then the wind shifted. A crazy wind. It swung from north to south like a wildly swaying pendulum. The snow was crazily tossed. A fount of it struck the Plaza; snow surging like a giant whirlpool—a white geyser spouting into a mounting cascade of flakes. It sucked up the drift-snow from the ground. The naked rock surface showed for a moment, and then was covered as the blanket of white fell back upon it.

The gale was now roaring about our windows, an incredible torrent of sound. Inconceivable was the scene of storm-tossed snow enveloping the snug, compact little city!

I tried to reassure myself that it could not harm us, this man-made tempest, unless too prolonged. But as the thought came to me, it was denied by actualities. A blast from the north and south simultaneously seemed to collide almost upon us. Our tower shook. Some of its outer windows shattered; there was a rumble, sharp, almost like a thunderclap, as the air rolled back.

Bland gripped me. His face for the first time had a startled fear upon it. "Welch, that could blow us down!"

Rankin muttered, "Look there—"

A vivid blue flash through the murk briefly illumined the city. We saw a distant building—a supply house it proved to be—shattered and broken, collapsed like a child's house of cards under the crazy air pressures of the tossing wind.

"We're lost if this goes on," Bland murmured. But it did not. It was only Naina's effort to show us what a blue blizzard might do. The wind suddenly whirled away and left a dead, ominous calm. The blue lightning vanished.

The snow, in a few minutes more, petered out and ceased falling. The cloud overhead thinned. The stars broke through.

And presently there was a cloudless sky. A still, calm night, quiet and peaceful as before.

We gazed at the city, strangely buried in great masses of drift snow. One street was piled twenty feet high; another swept clean and bare; and that single building lying broken. The sky was empty, save for the brilliant, serene stars.

Naina's plane had gone.

CHAPTER XI.

MURDER.

DAVID sat staring at the television mirror in the cabin of Naina's plane. The plane was slowly circling above the cloud. On the mirror from the dangling lens the storm-tossed city was a blur of gray-white murk.

"Why," said David, "this won't do anything, Naina. It can't hurt them; they're prepared for it."

She did not answer. She sat tensely silent, staring at the mirror.

David's mind flung northward. He saw, as though with prophetic vision,

a great northern city—New York City, perhaps, with its towering buildings of masonry and steel; its millions of people. New York City in the summertime, perhaps. Sweltering in the heat. Not the compact and sturdy polar village of Little America, but the huge beehive that was New York. A cloud in the sky some summer night; a sudden seeming thunderstorm, and then snow! A blizzard with sub-zero temperatures, descending suddenly upon a shirt-sleeved sweltering multitude. What a weapon for modern warfare was this! He envisaged the lurking enemy in the cloud-hidden sky—Chile, perhaps!

His mind swept to Margones. This Chilean bandit had the secret.

"It can't hurt Little America."

But on the mirror he saw in the dim swirling murk the collapse of the storehouse building. Why, this could bring death to every home in Little America!

David rose to his feet. He forgot the guard in the doorway behind them.

"Naina, stop! You have shown them!"

She leaped up. Even with her emotion, she had the presence of mind to gesture to the guard. David took a step and gripped her by the shoulders. The guard stood alert, with weapon upraised, but he did not fire.

David repeated vehemently, "You have done enough; you have shown them!"

She met the challenging gaze, and abruptly he relaxed, for he knew that this time he had won. She drooped under the grip of his fingers.

She murmured, "David, don't. You hurt me."

"Tell your men to stop that storm!" He released her.

She raised her arms. She gave the

command. She turned away from David and stood gazing through the window where beneath the ship the blue lightning presently ceased its flashes and the cloud was dissipating.

David sat watching her. For ten minutes or more she did not move. The plane had turned and sped away. The cloud was gone. The serene starlit night was around them.

David said at last, "Naina, come here."

She stood, grim, white, and silent; imperious; lost in her thoughts.

"Naina, come here. Sit with me."

She turned, and on her face was a hint of triumph.

"You saw, David?"

"Yes, I saw."

She sat down by him.

He said presently, "You have shown them. But to what purpose?"

It swept him again, the power of this weapon.

"Naina, you are an American. If your country—if our country had such a weapon as this, for war or for peace—why, Naina, there's no limit to what it could do. Drive away storms instead of make them."

He put out his hand and touched her arm. He added gently, "That would be better, Naina, wouldn't it?"

She allowed his hand to rest there. Her face was turned away from him. He sat very still; and suddenly she shook off his hand and, turning, gestured to the guard to go back from the doorway.

DAVID followed her gesture. When she was back beside him, he touched her again—touched her arm, and then found her hand and clasped it.

The cabin was very silent. Only the thrum of the motors and the occasional

voice of one of the men in the adjoining room.

"Naina, why do you hate my country—our country—so much?"

He said it very gently, earnestly. His hand tightened upon hers. He held his breath, afraid that his words would anger her.

But it seemed now as though perhaps the spell of his manhood, his emotion—or the emotion between them, perhaps, surging through their clasped fingers, were at last too strong for her anger.

She said finally, and her voice now was different; softer, more gentle than he had ever heard it before:

"I'll tell you. I had never thought I would tell any one. My father—" A break came to her voice, but she went steadily on: "My father was born an American. That's true. And he would have been, perhaps, a great man in his country. But then they said, one day, that he was a murderer."

David sat very still, listening as she poured it out. Her father had been arrested for murder; she did not know the details, or perhaps now she did not care to tell them. He had been tried and convicted upon evidence largely circumstantial. He had been sent to prison with his appeal denied, and had languished there for ten of the best years of his life.

"But he got away, David. I can't tell you how. He got away—broke from the prison and escaped."

A fugitive! Pursued by the law. A man without a country; living always in the shadow of capture. And he had wandered at last, like so many of his kind, into the new desolation which to him and others like him was the lure of Antarctica.

He was a man of intelligence. Doubtless a born leader, he dominated

the Antarctic natives. And so at last he had come to be known as the White Bandit. Obsessed with hatred for his country that had driven him here—

"You mean," said David, "that he was innocent of the crime?"

"Yes. Innocent, and the bungling laws of your United States wrecked him. And then at last he was vindicated."

Ten years ago now, in 1950, some one, some criminal in New York City, had, dying, confessed to the crime for which Naina's father—his name was Roberts—was paying the penalty. He had brought proof beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Why," exclaimed David, "then he need not have been a fugitive after that. Ten years ago—"

She blazed at him. "But do you think, with his life wrecked by the hardships he had passed through, that he would return then when the announcement reached him. Oh, yes, he could have gone back!

"The newscasters carried it: 'The murderer Roberts was innocent.' But how could that make it up to him? Who seemed sorry that his life had been so terrible? Who did anything but sneer and say: 'Oh, well, it seems that the murderer Roberts was innocent after all!'"

She ended with a vehement, passionate outburst: "It only made him hate them worse, and made me hate them. Do you see? And they sneered at the White Bandit. They didn't know it was my father doing what he could to keep them out of Antarctica. I was born here. My mother was a native here. It was her country, and it became my father's country, and it's my country! And your cursed people come stealing into it, spreading out, taking the land—my land! I won't allow it!"

She stopped. David could find nothing to say. This girl, as Johnson had said, was so pathetic!

He stammered: "Naina, I—" He wanted to say, "I love you. Why, Naina, I said it might be hate, and you said it was fear. But it's love." But he only stammered, "Oh, Naina, you poor girl!"

She drew away from him. "I don't want your pity." The pathos had gone from her face and left it grim again. "Stay where you are, David. I should not have bothered to tell you all that."

SHE left him sitting by the empty television mirror, and went into the control room. In a moment the guard came and again stood in the doorway, with his automatic upon David, and his alert eyes watching.

They flew on through the starlit night. One hour more? Or two hours? Beneath the windows the frozen desolate landscape slid past. And David's thoughts were flying, too, thinking of this pathetic girl.

They passed over the familiar valley, the grim frozen mountains. As they neared the camp David's thoughts flew ahead; it seemed that a premonition came to him. Margones!

David recalled what Johnson had said concerning the bandit's possible purpose. There was gold in these mountains; Margones and his band were after it; and Johnson knew where it was.

David had been able to cope with Naina. But now, like a warning, came the realization that Naina was not his dangerous enemy. He must face Margones.

The plane landed on the field by the forlorn little settlement. In the shifting lights David saw the assembled natives. There seemed nothing amiss.

"Are we going inside, Naina—in the cave?"

"Yes."

She avoided explanations to her men. She gave directions concerning the plane.

"Come, David."

She hurried him away, and they entered the cave mouth. There were dogs and men inside. A spot of light showed women before a low stone shelter on the cave floor—a family group huddled there. The women were chewing skins to make boots for their men.

All normal. But David was breathing fast. There seemed none of Margones's band in sight.

"Naina, where should Margones be?"

"I left him guarding Johnson and Helga."

They passed through the lower entrance to Naina's cliff house. She added: "I suppose the officials of Little America will be trying to phone me. I think this time I shall answer them; there is a mountain phone station not so far from here. We will go to my instrument room, David. You have not seen my receiving sets."

"Naina, take me first to Johnson."

They were in the lower corridor. She stopped and eyed him in the bloom of one of the corridor lights.

"You mean, take you to Helga?"

"Yes. Helga and her father. I'm worried."

It came to David that he was more than worried. "I'm afraid that Margones—"

It startled her—his words, or his set, white face.

"All right, we'll go see them first. David, I shall tell them in Little America that my next storm will bring death, wreck the city. I can do it—you saw that building fall."

7 A

They went down the stone steps into the lower corridor. They had passed a native or two on the upper level. But it was silent and deserted down below.

They traversed the lower passage, with its glowing, dull illumination and its fetid air. They came to the door of Johnson's cell.

Margones and two or three of his men should have been here.

"Why," said Naina, "what's this? How dare he leave his post?"

No one here. In the silence David seemed to hear his heart pounding. No one here. The cell door was closed. Naina bent to it.

"How dare he—"

The door was unbarred. Had Johnson and Helga broken away and escaped? But in that instant, as Naina rattled the locks and opened the door, David instinctively knew it was not so. With a premonitory chill of horror, he was shivering.

Naina pushed the door open and they went in.

They stood for an instant transfixed. Upon the floor, sprawled face down, lay the motionless body of Johnson.

Helga was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

IN PURSUIT.

JOHNSON was dead. There was no doubt of it as they knelt over him. David lifted up the body.

"Murdered!"

It was strangely gruesome. There was no blood, no sign of a wound. The body was cold, rigid. The garments were moist; they had been frozen with a film of ice which now was melted in the warmth of the room. The flesh had a blue cast to it.

David rose. "He's taken Helga!"

Naina stood stricken; confused and with a white anger sweeping her. "Why, how dare he?"

David gripped her. "We must go after them in your plane. Has he a plane, Naina? Was there any other plane?"

"No."

They rushed back through the corridor. Naina came to an ascending cross passage, and through a small door David suddenly found himself in the main outer cave room. It was quiet, but Naina's voice echoed through it.

The natives clustered around her. The place was in confusion. They jabbered, but they were all frightened at her anger.

It was exasperating to David, not understanding the language. He stood for a moment in the midst of the group. Margones and his band had departed, that was obvious. But how long ago? Every moment was precious.

"What do they say?" he demanded. "Come on, we've got to get your plane."

"He and his men left on their sleds. These fools here! Margones told them he was making a trip by my orders. His men slipped away, a few at a time."

"How long ago?"

"I don't know." She gripped a small Antarctic man by the shoulders. She shook him, and he cringed before her, chattering with fright.

"He says they have been gone about two hours."

"Was Helga with them?"

"He thinks so. Some one in a long white cloak and a hood. It must have been Helga. These fools!"

From the cave house doorway a man came running. Naina heard what he had to say.

"What is it?" David demanded again.

"He had heard on the radiophone a message broadcasted for me from Little America, in the native dialect."

She stood bewildered with these swift conflicting happenings. "The United States demands my answer. My three American prisoners must be released or in a few days warplanes will be sent to seek me out. David—"

He waved it away. "Forget that. We've got to catch Margones and release Helga. Shall we take your plane to Little America and get help?" No, that would need too much time. "If this murderer went with sleds, Naina, he'll be leaving a trail in the snowpack. If the weather holds—if it does not snow—we can follow him with the plane, flying low."

A shot sounded from the open valley outside the cave. Then another.

David and Naina stood listening. A silence fell around them. Then a commotion began, there were more shouts outside.

The plane! Cylinder-weapon in hand, Naina rushed out, with David beside her. The little settlement huddled in the snow was in a turmoil. A sudden fight had taken place at the plane in which Naina and David had arrived a few moments before. Whatever it was, it was over now. There were no more shots.

"Come, David!"

THEY ran. At the plane Naina's natives surrounded her. She gasped and turned to David. Now, for the first time, he saw fear on her face.

"Margones left three or four of his men—my natives killed them when they tried to steal the plane."

They mounted into the control room

of the plane. It was crowded with frightened, excited people. The bodies of the Chilean bandits, who had been shot, lay there. One was still alive, but dying.

The control mechanism of the plane was wrecked. The last of the bandits, wounded, had, in a frenzy, torn at it. The electric controls were smashed. It would take hours, perhaps days, to repair them.

To David, it was in a moment obvious what had happened. Margones had murdered Johnson, abducted Helga, and, with his sleds, dogs and most of his band, had departed. But he wanted the plane. He had left some of his men in hiding here to seize it on its arrival and fly it to join him.

David drew Naina away. "Naina, this is no time to get excited. Anger is foolish. We've got to follow them."

"Yes. How dared he! If once I can get these hands on him!"

She stood with David outside the plane. He waved away the natives who crowded around them.

"Naina, what is the swiftest way to follow them? A sled?"

"Yes, a sled! I will take a sled with my fastest dogs—I can overtake him."

"You mean, go alone?"

"Yes. It's the fastest way—I have only seven fast dogs."

"I'll go with you."

"If once I can get my hands on him—how dared he do a thing like this?"

She stood tense, lost in thought. David knew that her dominant emotion was desire for vengeance upon Margones. She had ruled so imperiously; instinctively she felt that she only needed to have Margones within the sound of her voice to reduce him again to subjection.

But David's thoughts were upon practicalities. With the plane wrecked,

they were helpless here in this cold, desolate mountain fastness. It seemed best to follow the bandits with a single sled and fast dogs. There were twenty or more men in Margones's band. It would not be feasible to attack them. David would follow them cautiously and watch for a travelers' hut where a radiophone would be available. Margones and his band—whatever their purpose—would locate perhaps in some desolate, hidden spot. David would trail them there, and phone to Little America for help.

But he said none of this to Naina. Instead he exclaimed: "Get your sled ready. Hurry, Naina; your fastest dogs—I'll drive them. Provisions and water, all the equipment, and bring some weapons. Tell your natives we will be gone on a journey of a few days. Get a complete equipment."

"Yes!" she agreed.

"We'll catch him, Naina, if this clear weather holds."

The sled was presently ready. David was enveloped in his furs, which he had not worn for the flight in the plane. Naina was garbed in a long, heavy white cloak and hood. They stood by the sled, with its six dogs harnessed two abreast, and the lead dog in front.

The natives gathered in the gloom of the ragged outskirts of the settlement to see them off. The snowfield was a dim white-purple; the purple, star-strewn sky was cloudless.

"Ready, Naina? You have weapons?"

"Yes."

The sled was piled high with equipment roped to it.

David said, "Have you got an automatic?"

"Yes."

"Give me it."

He held his breath. He and Naina had always, so far, been in the rôles of captor and prisoner; enemies, with a barrier between them. He repeated casually, "Give me the automatic."

She hesitated. He added simply, "I am your friend, Naina."

She handed it to him without a word.

David seized the handles of the sled. "You ride."

"Yes. We start downhill."

In a moment they were away. The dogs ran low to the ground, picking up speed. The packed snow showed a long gentle declivity. David in a moment mounted the sled for the coasting descent. The low white huts flashed by in a blur of movement. Soon they were farther apart; then they were gone.

The descent ended. The pace slackening, David leaped out and ran swiftly beside the sled, urging the animals forward with a long, lashing quirt. An undulating white desolation lay ahead. A trackless waste, pale in the starlight. But David could see now the tracks of the bandits' sleds which they were following.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE GOLD IS YOURS!"

I MUST revert now to that time when Margones shoved Helga into the room with her father.

The bandit said to Naina: "You can trust me always, *señorita*," as he closed the cell door. Helga had seen the leer upon his face. She was frightened, with a cold, shuddering fear; and it was seldom indeed that Helga was frightened at anything.

"Father, dear!"

She threw herself into her father's

arms. They stood listening while Margones barred the door. Naina departed.

"Father, I'm afraid of that fellow Margones."

He comforted her, as though she were the little girl of twelve he had always remembered.

"Naina is starting for Little America, Helga?"

"Yes."

"I've been worried about you. Did she treat you kindly?"

"Yes. She said I could stay here with you while they're gone. She took David Dragon with her."

His thin face softened, relaxed. "It will come out all right, Helga. Some day, when we get back from here into God's country—"

Life is very strange. It was given to Johnson to find the little daughter of his memories grown to a beautiful, capable, intelligent young woman; sitting with him for those few brief hours—and then to have his own life snuffed out.

To Johnson, this daughter must indeed have seemed very beautiful. Helga wore a suit of blue serge. Over it was a long cloak with a hood which dangled at the back. The cloak was a deep navy blue with a vivid red lining, a heavy military-looking cloak. She had worn it on the trip down with a fur coat over it, and an aviator's helmet. The latter were discarded in the other cell, but she wore here into her father's room this blue and red undercloak.

Johnson gazed at her. "You are very beautiful, Helga."

"You like it? In Washington they teased me about it—said it was very vivid." She took it off and laid it aside.

They talked for an hour of two. Then the door opened. Margones was

out there. He seemed alone. He had a metal tray in his hand.

"Your food," he said. He came in and put it on the table. He did not look at Helga. He turned and stalked out. The door slammed; they heard the rattle of its bars.

After the meal was over, Johnson, who had been talking in casual fashion, suddenly became furtive. He gazed at the door and lowered his voice.

"Helga, if I shouldn't get out of here alive—"

She flashed a startled glance at him. He smiled. "I've something I must say to you, something I must tell you."

He went quietly to the door and listened, then came back.

"He can't hear us, Helga. Above everything I wouldn't have him hear this. But I must tell you. One of the purposes of Blakely's expedition was prospecting in these mountains. There is gold here; Blakely believed it. The government wanted him to find it and stake it for the United States. More than half the money for his expedition was government money. No one but he and I knew that."

Johnson's voice was vehement and tense. A spot of red burned in each of his thin cheeks. "I've never told any one of this, Helga. Eight years ago—and I'm the only survivor of the Blakely expedition. The gold is mine, Helga! You know the law. Mine and my country's."

"You found it?" she murmured quietly.

"Yes. We found it here in these mountains. Not so very far from here. We found it, only a few hours before the White Bandit captured us. There seemed to be a mountain of it! The outcropping was visible for half a mile along a cliff-face. Nuggets, Helga!

Strewn at the bottom of the cliff, as though by an avalanche."

HE seemed talking against time. As though by some strange intuition the shadow of his impending death now lay upon him; he seemed to sense its nearness.

"That gold is yours, Helga. If I shouldn't live through this, you are my survivor—the last survivor of the Blakely expedition. And I want you to claim it. You know the law—the colonial law for such discoveries here in Antarctica? Or has it been changed?"

"No," she said. "Not changed."

"Well, it would be done like this."

The discussion absorbed them. They had been gazing, one or the other of them, at the cell door constantly. But now they forgot it, staring at each other, tense with this thing they were discussing.

The international law in Antarctica had been ratified by all the several nations holding possessions in the new continent. The conference had been held in London in 1951. By the terms of the agreement reached, the discovery of any natural wealth in any neutral, unclaimed territory belonged to the country of the discoverer. It was necessary then to plant upon the strike his national flag, and at once to notify the International Claim Office in London. In these days of almost universal government ownership and government exploitation, all the wealth of Antarctica was being developed by government funds.

"This is neutral territory, Helga. It will add a whole new region to Colonial America. It's worth colonizing."

The law said that the nation making the strike must establish and hold a settlement with a certain population.

This done, at the end of a year, the other nations recognized the validity of the claim.

To the discoverer, his nation paid a royalty. "Enough to make us fabulously rich, Helga—no doubt of that."

He lowered his voice still further. "There's a radiophone travelers' hut quite near our golden mountain, Helga."

His voice rang with the words. He repeated them. "Our golden mountain! Don't you like the sound of that? It's ours—yours and mine! If we can get out of here—to that phone hut—and send in a call for help to record the strike. Closer, Helga, I want to tell you where it is."

He murmured it to her. He could not tell her how far it was from Naina's camp, but he gave her the latitude and longitude.

She said suddenly, "Father, not so loud! You're talking too loudly!"

With his eagerness he had spoken louder than he realized. His back was to the cell door. Helga faced him. She gazed into his flushed, earnest face.

He reiterated, "It's all for you, Helga. That's what I've had in mind all these years."

Her heart was suddenly pounding. She went cold with fear. In the cell the odor of alcoholite became apparent—that intoxicating perfume which of recent years has been the curse of South America.

Alcoholite wafting in here?

Helga's gaze leaped past her father's shoulder. The cell door was ajar!

"Father!"

The startled exclamation burst from her before she could check it.

"Helga—what"

He turned with a rasp of his chair to follow her gaze.

They had betrayed themselves.

The cell door, which was open a few inches, swung wider. Margones crouched there, leering, the evidence of his menace written clearly on his face. In that instant, Helga, cold with fear, knew that the bandit had heard them talking of their golden mountain—had heard even its location, perhaps.

HELGA and her father leaped to their feet. "What do you want?" Johnson demanded.

Margones advanced, lurching, for he was far from sober. A wave of the intoxicating perfume came with him into the room; a strip of gaudy fabric hung like a handkerchief at his chest; he stopped to sniff at it as he advanced.

"Get out," said Johnson. "You're drunk." His arm swept Helga protectively behind him.

Margones did not speak, but he snarled, and ripped his cylinder-weapon from his belt. Helga was aware of the stab of blue flame. She felt its frigid blast. It caught her father full in the face. He wavered; mumbled thickly:

"Helga! Run—"

He swung about, clutching at her, with the blue ray on him. A wave of incredible cold, with a thick white mist like a fog rolled at Helga. She staggered; and then her father fell.

The blue light vanished. The fog rolled away. Across the room, Helga saw Margones reeling back against the wall, grinning. She was numb with fright and the deadly cold. At her feet Johnson lay motionless. She sank upon him.

"Father! Father dear!"

Ice was formed upon his face; his blue lips were frozen; his thin garments stiff.

The knowledge that he was dead surged upon her. She sank inert into the black soundlessness of insensibility.

Realization that he had killed Johnson must have sobered Margones. Helga was unconscious only a moment; she recovered to find Margones carrying her along a dim passage.

As she stirred he set her abruptly upon her feet and stood steadying her until she was able to walk.

The corridor was empty. He whispered: "You come quietly. If I have to carry you it will cause comment. If we are stopped, I will kill you—by the blessed Santa Maria, I swear it!" He led her forward. "Can you walk?"

"Yes." She was too confused to dissemble. She took a few steps; strength was coming back to her.

"Come then." He had brought her red and blue cloak from the cell. He flung it over her shoulders. Over it, he put another cloak of the white fabric, and drew its hood over her head.

"There, that will protect you from the cold. You come quietly, you understand? *Por Dios!* If you make a scene—if I am stopped or caused any trouble—then, beautiful as you are, I will kill you!"

He clung to her arm, hurrying her along. Her face and head were warm beneath the white hood. She could see very little. She was still weak and faint; confused, and with the horror of her father's death upon her.

All was a blur. She found that they were in the outer cave. She heard voices of the Antarcticans around their huts.

THERE was no alarm. Several of Margones's band joined them surreptitiously.

"Are you ready, Margones?"

"Yes."

"We start now?"

"Yes, Vicente. Are the sleds waiting?"

Whispered words in Spanish, Helga could understand it.

"All in waiting, master. Who is this you have? The girl?"

"Get out of our way, idiot! Walk along with us quietly."

They were leaving the cavern; the cold outer air blew on Helga's face. Through the hood opening, she saw the stars of the deep purple night.

"Faster, Helga."

"Who is this, master—the girl?"

Fingers plucked at her hood.

"Let her alone, damn you!" Margones rasped. "Vicente, it's gold! Millions of pesos of it! I got the location of it out of Johnson—he did know where it was, as we thought! Gold for us all. Hush! Here comes that ass Umo."

Some of Naina's natives accosted them in the Antarctic tongue. Helga, helpless, stood tense with Margones clutching her. He evidently satisfied the natives. They passed on, along one of the streets of the settlement.

Several times Margones was accosted; always his grip tightened upon Helga as he stopped to answer.

They came at last to a lonely place at the edge of the village. She heard Margones giving directions to four of his men. They were to wait, hidden in the village, until Naina returned with the plane, and then seize it, and join Margones.

Sleds and dogs were here, in a bustle of activity. A loaded sled and three men started off; then another.

The bandits were quietly departing. Ten minutes or more passed, until at last there was only one sled left; and Helga found herself standing alone with Margones.

"Come, little sweet one, it is our turn to start now. The traveling will be easy over the trail they blaze for

us. And in a few hours we will have the plane."

She stood in the starlight watching him as he moved about the sled with its line of harnessed dogs. The impulse to turn and run came to her. There were several huts here at the edge of the village, but they had been used by the bandits. They were unoccupied now. There seemed no one within immediate hearing; the dim settlement lights were several hundred yards away up the slope of the snow-field.

Margones was watchful. He came back to her. "You ride, Helga."

He put her on the sled, and enveloped her in furs. His touch lingered upon her warningly.

"Lie quiet."

The lead dog turned the sled at Margones's gesture. They started; slid out into the center of the packed, white roadway. The sled gathered speed. Margones ran at its handles, then he mounted it for a long swift descent.

CHAPTER XIV.

HELGA AT BAY.

HELGA glanced up from the Primus stove over which she was bent. She asked, "Where did you get this, Margones?"

He grinned. "It came from one of your captured exploring expeditions. You've used this kind of stove before?"

"Yes."

She soon had the food ready. "Sit here, Margones."

It was their first camping place, a bowl-like depression in the snow-field with ice crags near by, and the deep purple dome of stars overhead. They had traveled fast for several hours, and had overtaken the bandit sleds which were in advance of them.

Margones kept Helga apart from his fellows. The bandits were encamped now a few hundred yards away, a noisy, roistering group. When they first arrived, Helga had heard considerable discussion concerning this American girl which Margones was taking with them. The news of the gold had spread among the bandits. They were jubilant; they did not want the complication of Helga. There had been one argument.

"You fool, don't you know we take extra danger having this American girl? Suppose a warplane comes?"

"You leave that to me."

"Lupe, the chief likes woman's beauty more than gold!"

A roar of laughter.

"You leave that to me. I am master here."

Helga sat listening. She heard them planning; they had found at last what they were after. They were headed now to verify the location of the gold; to find the nearest hut where a radio-phone would be available; to telephone Santiago Pequeño. They would have a plane sent with the national flag to record the strike for Chile.

There had been discussion also concerning Naina's plane; they expected every moment that the four men they had left in Naina's camp would arrive with it. During the trip Margones had often cast a backward glance into the stars; but so far there had been no sign of it.

Margones cursed the calmness of the weather. If a snowfall would only come and obliterate their trail—or if the plane would come and take them aboard and thus leave their tracks ending blindly here in the snow waste. But the plane did not come. And the weather held calm and cloudless.

Helga had fought and conquered her

emotion. She was pretending docility, even friendliness. She wondered if it fooled this man.

Margones had been drunk when he entered Johnson's cell. But he was sober enough afterward. He sat now by the Primus stove with Helga. They ate the meal. She was conscious always of his gaze upon her. He said abruptly:

"I know where this outcropping of gold is." He grinned. "A Chilean city will be built there within a month. I and my men will all be rich. You do not ask why I take you with me?"

It made her heart stop. She said, "No. Why?"

"Because you are a woman. I love you."

HE said it with a sudden rush of intensity. He reached toward her, but she moved away.

She forced herself to say steadily, "You frighten me—because I am a woman."

"Frighten you?"

"Yes."

Their gazes met. He had flung back the white insulated garment which enveloped him. A gaudy sash was tied about his waist. A scarf was around his hair, exposed now as he pushed back his hood. His heavy blue-jowled face was smiling at her. A very modern, romantic fellow this Chilean renegade must have believed himself to be.

He said, "*Ay de mi!* I want not to frighten you, *chiquita.*"

She wondered if he could see how really frightened she was. Her eyes held level; she added:

"Women of my race understand man's love. But fear does not mix with love. You do not want me afraid of you, Margones?"

He said, "My name is Ramón—"

She echoed, "Ramón." She even smiled at him, this murderer of her father. In her heart was a fierce hatred; but she smiled.

"No," he said. "You have nothing to fear from love—it brings joy, not fear. Am I not good to look at? Among all my people, it is said I am good to inspire woman's love—and your love I want!"

A vague confidence came to her. She said, "I feared you at first, but not so much now. No! Don't do that!"

His hand had gripped her shoulder; she shook it off vehemently. But she forced a smile. "You do not understand a woman like me, Ramón. A different race—love comes differently—slowly and only when fear is gone." She added, with a break in her voice against all her efforts to control it:

"You do not want the woman rebellious—the woman without love? That is—not interesting, is it, Ramón?"

"No," he said sullenly. From under his robe he brought the strip of fabric; and a small bottle. He was about to pour some of the perfume, but she checked him.

"No, Ramón. That is not the thing a man should do. You endanger us. We need all your great strength, your cleverness."

He hesitated. She reached for the little bottle.

"Try it," he said eagerly. "Smell the vapor from it. That is love, Helga."

"No. I was taking it from you. Let me keep it."

He took it back. But she had gained her point; he put it away.

For a time they ate in silence. Helga's gaze went over the scene around them.

It was an utter desolation, with this man and woman crouching by the

flames of the tiny stove, and the bandits encamping near by. The sleds stood at hand. The dogs had been fed; they curled in the snow, tangling the harness. Off to the right a great ramp of snow slanted up obliquely. It loomed vaguely white in the starlit darkness.

Margones had said that after they rested, they would go that way. He had instruments; and he seemed familiar with the region—confident that he could find the mountain pass and the valley which Johnson had described to Helga.

Still the plane did not arrive from Naina's camp. Helga heard the bandits cursing it.

MARGONES said, "Well, we go on with the sleds then, Helga. It is not so far now, this gold of ours."

"What will you do?" she asked.

"Do? We will locate it and camp by it. And then find a radiophone. In Santiago Pequeño they will be glad to know what we found. It will be for Chile, Helga—your country and mine. You will be a rich woman—richest of all in Santiago Pequeño. We will live there—or perhaps we go north, to Chile? Every luxury money brings will be yours, *ninita mía*—"

He would have touched her, but she avoided him again. "Not here, Ramón. Your men are watching."

He was flushed. "You like my plans? Great wealth—what woman can withstand it? And I am a man who knows what the woman wants—beautiful silks, and music, and the alcoholite of love."

Helga's gaze turned over the snow-waste to where their tracks went back toward Naina's camp. In the starlit darkness the trail could not be seen very far. Was any one following?

Would David, perhaps, be able to follow?

The bandits were ready to start again.

"Come, Helga."

"Yes," she said obediently.

They loaded the sled. Furtively Helga extracted a handkerchief from her pocket and dropped it in the snow.

"Yes, Ramón, I'm ready."

They started, all the sleds in a line now. Margones was jubilant. "Those fool men I left at the camp, they have failed to get the plane. But what matter. See, Helga, the snow comes."

The night was clouding over. A still calm fall of snow was beginning. It would not impede their traveling, but it would obliterate the trail.

They journeyed on, winding upward now into a broken country. Mountains showed ahead of them. Another hour. The snow was steadily falling.

The line of sleds wound at last into a mountain pass. Helga and Margones were now leading. Through the pass, into a little valley.

The golden mountain! The words echoed in Helga's mind, a requiem to her poor dead father. A cliff was here with a broad slope down from a ledge near its top—a ramplike declivity down to the valley floor. Ice-craggs were piled about; the snow lay thick. But there were places where the wind had bared the naked rock, with only the soft, present snowfall whitening it.

Margones stooped over a loose pile of stones. He held one up.

"Gold, Helga!"

She stared at the little chunk of rock, green-yellow with its gold. Nuggets of it here. This metallic rock, lying here hidden in the polar desolation—all the world's civilized luxury could be had in exchange for this! An avalanche of gold, fallen here at the foot

of this cliff. There across the ragged, frozen mountain face, the outcropping vein lay like a swordslash. The "Johnson Lode," it is marked now on the charts.

The bandits gathered in triumph. They stood and gloated and picked up the stones and filled their pockets. The snowflakes swirled around them.

And Helga stood silent with the vision of her dead father's face before her. His words were echoing. "Our golden mountain."

The valley was open at the farther end—an upward slope toward the Chilean colony; Santiago Pequeño was that way, not over two hundred miles, Margones figured.

"We will camp here, Helga."

SOME of the bandits had mounted to the ledge up the cliff. There seemed to be a cave-mouth up there. The ascent was not too steep for the dog-sleds.

The bandits called down.

"A cave," said Margones. "They have found a cave."

They climbed. The snow momentarily ceased. The stars briefly showed through a break in the clouds. The scene brightened.

"Helga, do you see that?"

Across the valley, a few miles away, was another jagged cliff-face. On its white, frozen side, a black spot showed. Margones studied it with his binoculars.

"A travelers' hut, Helga! Look—*Dios*, what luck is this!"

She took the glass. A little stone hut was perched on the rocks; the international flag, ragged and weather-worn, waved in the wind from the peak of its roof. Eerie little refuge, hanging at the edge of a cliff; set there so that storms might not bury it. An

improvised stone staircase led down a hundred feet to the lower rock levels. Behind the hut, a white plateau stretched upward and back into a starry darkness.

"You see it, Helga?"

"Yes." She returned the binoculars. "Yes, I see it."

She sat at the entrance to the cave, watching them struggle up with their sleds and equipment. The snow was falling again; the stone hut across the valley was almost invisible in the murk.

"Lupe, come here; you will be the one to go."

Helga watched and listened while Margones and Lupe talked in Spanish. A small fellow, this Lupe Albeniz, swarthy and dark, with a fiercely overgrown black mustache. His white robe was hunched grotesquely at the waist with a broad black leather belt. An automatic hung there in a holster, a cylinder projector of the Johnson ray; and a long, broad knife, like an old-fashioned machete.

"Lupe, we will be busy here. You go send the radiophone. Call Marianao—Señor Auguste Marianao, Calle Valdez. You know him?"

"Yes—sure I do."

"Tell him that he will come in a plane. We have the gold located—it is the richest of what we could have hoped. Bring the Chilean flag, and official witnesses, so that at once we can notify London. Tell him that we will expect him in an hour or two. *Por Dios*, we're rich, Lupe! Tell him we will all of us be rich!"

The golden mountain!

Lupe, on foot presently started away. His white figure almost immediately was swallowed by the white falling snow.

Helga sat staring.



"For the sake of Truck Two's reputation, you can resign. But you ought to be hung!"

Trouble in Truck Two

Never did a feud have stranger climax than the rivalry of grizzled Captain Hansen and young Carter, newcomer to the death-scorning brotherhood of fire-fighters

By ROBERT J. PEARSALL

"**T**ALKIN' as man to man, now, you're a bunch of lily-fingered loafers. Firemen, you call yourselves! Bah! Sody-water jerkers you are, wearin' firemen's pants, and disgracin' them. Talkin' as man to men, now—any of you want to take it up?"

It was rough talk even for Captain Hansen, who was of the old school of smoke swallows, but he was almost insane. For the second time, Truck Six had come into his own back yard and plastered a blazing building with ladders. His Truck Two, that

had never been beaten in the old days, was becoming the laughing-stock of the department; and for its reputation Hansen cared no less than for his two eyes. So he glared across the smoking room at his assembled men, hunching his shoulders and thrusting his pugnacious face forward.

Half the men, and more, seemed to take his insults complacently. Queerly enough, they were the hard-looking men, the beefy, middle-aged, tobacco-chewing men of the captain's own type, jutting of jaw and ready fisted. There was even a pleased glint in their eyes.

But at the left of the line, six men scowled. Younger men, these were, and running more to forehead, but well set up and well muscled, too. One of them took a half step forward, and Hansen caught the movement.

"Ladderman Carter! You takin' it up?"

Carter's eyes flamed, but he checked himself. Held himself as on a leash for a moment. Clamped his jaw and choked something back. Smiled tensely and replied in a repressed voice:

"No, I'm not taking it up. Not in the way you mean, anyway. I was only going to say it was an accident."

"Accident, eh! *You* say it was an accident. Well, now, my young dude, till your signature's dry on the pay roll, suppose you let me distinguish the difference between accident and gross incompetence."

"Very well, captain. I will."

"Kind of you, I'm sure." But sarcasm didn't come natural to Hansen, and he went on with renewed anger. "The next time anybody slams a truck into a telephone pole, it won't be the commissioner that tends to him; it'll be the health department, after I get through with him. That's all now, unless somebody else has a word."

Nobody had, apparently, so Captain Hansen turned on his heel and marched to his office on the second floor, where he fell to work making a report with a stubby pen that at times splashed ink furiously.

Downstairs the company settled down to smoking and reading, but still with a clear division. The six younger men kept to themselves. It had been that way for a month.

In the bunkroom these same six slept, all at one end, nicely segregated. They had found that arrangement made for them when they came to

quarters. They were the new commissioner's protégés, appointed in accordance with his announced program of "replacing the older men in the more active companies with younger ones, fresh from the gymnasium and fire department school."

The older displaced men were transferred to the suburban station where the work was easier and there was no "steeple climbing."

THE program worked well in some companies, but not in Truck Two, where the only vacancy in five years had been caused by death in line of duty. The company was a fine machine whose individual parts were almost fanatically loyal to each other.

The men transferred were married, with children, and owned their own homes near by. Though twenty hours out of twenty-four belonged to the city, they could get home three times daily. The commissioner couldn't know what the loss of that privilege meant, but the old fire fighters left on Truck Two knew it well. They might be the next transfers, if this batch of dudes made good. Both self-interest and comradesly loyalty leagued them against the newcomers, with the natural result.

The newcomers reacted in kind and the breach widened; the two factions failed to work together at all; and Number Two, from being the city's crack company, had become almost the least efficient.

"Indians," they had been admirably called; but now the term was "Wooden Indians." The deputy commissioner had called them that this morning and it drove Captain Hansen furious. He was an "Indian" himself, an old-fashioned fireman to his finger tips, and to him there was no question where the fault in his company lay.

His blazing reprimands were directed solely to the newcomers, and everybody knew it.

What if the older men had seemingly slackened, too? How could they help it, when they had to work with that bunch of college dudes? That ired him the very worst. College men on his truck!

College men! Nice-talking men, with the courage educated out of 'em. Taught to keep their hands soft and save their own skins. Cowards, by Jupiter! And that man Carter was worst of the lot.

He hated Carter. And Carter hated him. It had begun the very moment they met. Carter had barely touched Hansen's formally extended hand. And Carter's eyes had been hostile—and strangely curious. Reluctantly and yet eagerly curious. Saying, "I hate you, but what kind of man are you?" That had touched Hansen on the raw.

Hansen had much to be sensitive about. His life had been a hard one and faulty. There was his boyhood here in Butchertown; his youth spent in gangdom, jail sentences and the like. Then marriage, poverty; drink and the devil. His wife had run away from him. A reckless exploit at a fire, then; and the reward—appointment as a fireman. That was where he belonged. Fighting fire was an instinct in him. It became a passion; he went up and up; but he didn't forget his past.

Carter had probably heard something about it. So Carter was judging him! That whippersnapper, who'd had everything soft all his life!

So he rode Carter harder than he rode the other newcomers; partly because it looked least safe, because Carter looked most like a fighter. He had a jaw like Hansen's—a forward thrusting jaw. He had the same big nose

and direct, driving gaze. And he had Hansen's figure of twenty years ago—oh, he could fight if he had the courage!

"Damn me if I know why I want to see him fight."

Hansen threw aside his pen. Carter kept coming between him and his work. Maybe Carter was to blame for all the rest—all the trouble in the company. If he could be got rid of, maybe things would be all right. Hansen rose and paced the floor.

"But why the devil do I want to like him?"

Then he stopped and listened. There was something doing down below. A heavy tramping of feet from the smoking room to the bunk room. He heard voices pitched high, then a sudden silence, and then some one said, "Carter!"

Another voice: "But maybe it was his own."

DESCENDING the stairs, Hansen met Ladderman Brown coming up. "I thought you ought to know, captain. Some one's taken Dameron's watch. Walters says it was Carter."

"Where's the rat now?"

"Just gone. He's just off duty. But the boys don't think—they don't want to think he intended it."

"Umph! If he took it, he intended it."

"Dawson's run after him. Says he knows which way he went."

Captain Hansen, followed by Brown, crossed the smoking room to the bunk room. He was just in time to see Carter enter from outside, escorted by Dawson. The men were very quiet, bunk room thievery being the only crime lower than cowardice to them. They looked at Carter with a combina-

tion of apology and suspicion. Carter was grinning, holding his head high, yet looking embarrassed, too.

"You fellows got after me just in time, or I'd have had this in a pawnshop," and he dangled a gold watch and chain in front of him. He spoke easily enough, but his face was brick red.

Damron took the watch, looking at Carter doubtfully. They all looked at him doubtfully except Captain Hansen.

"Of course, the way it happened—" began Carter.

He'd have an explanation, of course! "You thief! You damn thief!" Hansen caught Carter by the shoulder and whirled him around.

"Now"—holding Carter at the length of his arm—"for the sake of Truck Two's reputation, you can resign. But you'd ought to be hung. Of all the stinkin', low-down crimes—"

Carter's face had gone from red to white. There was a curious look of horror in his eyes. "*You!*" he almost whispered. Then anger seemed to overcome him. "If you call me a thief—that's a lie."

"Wait a minute, captain," said Damron uncertainly. But Hansen heard nothing after the word "lie," and he jerked Carter to him with one hand and struck with the other one, clenched. Carter went down, but was up like a cat, tense and snarling. In a crouch he started forward, and then he stopped.

His eyes were half closed, his teeth were clenched, and he was trembling. Then, almost in a whisper, between his closed teeth:

"I don't want to fight you," he said.

"Don't want to?" roared Hansen. "The hell of a lot you've got to say about it. You'll fight me, or—"

"I can't fight you," said Carter, lower still. "Don't make me, or—"

Hansen slapped his face. Carter stood like a statue. His face was like white marble, save for the print of Hansen's hand. He didn't seem to breathe. But he was careful not to look at Hansen again. It's hard for a fighter to hit a man who isn't looking at him. So when Carter turned away, Hansen let him. Everybody made way. Carter had a clear path to the door. Carter, the coward!

But at the door he turned. He glared flaming eyed at the room, but his voice was like frost-bitten steel.

"I'm going, and I'm not coming back. But I didn't steal that watch. I told Dawson how it happened. Damron's bunk is next to mine. He put his watch on the window sill between us. I'm in the habit of putting mine there. So when I changed my clothes and started out, I picked his up by mistake. You'll find mine in my other uniform. Melt it into a medal for your brave captain the next time he—"

Two bells! Their call! "Hey, boys! Hey!"

The men jumped at the sound of the fire gong, all else forgotten. Hansen led the way to the engine house, grabbing helmet and rubber coat en route. He leaped to the platform beside the chauffeur's seat, while the men stepped to their places on the running board. The whole apparatus was throbbing and quivering under the kick of the motor.

"Let 'er go," growled Hansen. "We're first due."

That was his thought now, to be first at the fire. He'd been beaten too often lately. The motor was picking up speed too sluggishly.

"Let 'er out. Let 'er out. D'ye think you're on parade?"

He rang the bell furiously, while the hum of the motor rose to crescendo.

NOW they were tearing down Market Street. The deputy chief's motor snorted past the truck. To the right Hansen could hear the siren of Engine Twelve wailing and moaning down Fifth Street. That was what he must beat—Engine Twelve. Ahead policemen were cutting off traffic, and beyond Hansen saw the fire, thick black smoke bellying out from very near the top of a tall office building.

Hansen's eyes grew hard. "The Hubbell Building. This 'll be a fast one, all right."

Up till then he'd thought of nothing but the fire. But now, glancing back at his men, he saw Carter on the running board. Carter was off duty, he'd quit, yet he had come. The most surprising thing about that was that Hansen wasn't much surprised.

He found himself aware of a sudden that Carter was no coward. He didn't know why he knew that—maybe it was Carter's last speech. But it seemed to him now that he'd known it all along, had known it even as he taunted Carter and struck him. Carter would fight any other man, but him he wouldn't fight. Now, why was that?

And why, in spite of the hatred between them, did he feel an almost furtive affection for the other? His hatred was easily explained; it had been aroused by Carter's. But why did Carter hate him?

Hansen jerked his thoughts away from that. Here was the fire.

And here was Engine Twelve rolling up at the same moment. With Truck Two first due!

Hansen leaped to the ground and sprinted to the deputy chief who stood on the curb. The men on the running

board followed, bearing rolls of hose. When they got to the curb, the crew of Number Twelve was even with them."

"Fire's on the fourteenth floor," snapped the deputy chief. "Get up to the thirteenth. One elevator's working."

Hansen had barely slackened speed to hear this, and his hose bearers followed close. But Crew Number Twelve hadn't slackened at all, and they were first to the elevator. The door slammed in Hansen's very face, and there was taunting laughter as the car rose slowly.

"Damn it! Take the stairs and beat 'em. No, here's another elevator."

"It's marked 'Out of order,'" said some one behind Hansen.

Hansen tore the door open. He hadn't seen the sign, but he wouldn't admit it. "Pile in and try it anyway." The deputy was shouting something through the outer door—probably another reprimand. First due, and second at the fire! Hansen slammed the door shut and jerked the crank. The car started.

Very slowly they rose. The car was old fashioned; for that matter, so was the whole building. Wisps of smoke curled down the shaft into the elevator. A few floors up, sparks began to find their way through the open sides. The smoke increased and the heat became very perceptible.

"Gosh! This looks like something. She's blazin' up there."

Hansen counted the floors. Fifth, sixth, seventh. Now the smoke was so thick that the floor numbers were invisible, and there was a steady sigh and roar of flames. The fire had taken a firm hold. The interior and trimmings of the building were of wood and it had been long regarded as

a fire menace. This was likely to be dangerous work.

The eleventh floor. Two more to go. The heat was intense, the elevator was filled with a blood-red glow and an ever-louder crackling and moaning. Hard on the nerves, this. A job for his old, seasoned veterans. There were two of the newcomers with him, besides Carter. Hansen was sorry for that.

"Ready, now. The thirteenth next," he warned.

There was a sudden movement in the cage behind him. A hand clutched his shoulder. "Stop! I just remembered. There's no—"

A booming crash from above drowned out the rest of it. Hansen laughed shortly. Some fool had lost his nerve. "Let go of me."

"There's no thirteenth, I tell you. There's no thirteenth."

Suddenly Hansen tensed. By heavens, that was right. A sop to superstition, that omission of number thirteen. The deputy chief hadn't known it, or else had forgotten it. Hansen punched the emergency button, but nothing happened. He was in an "Out of order" car. His skin was blistering, his throat was choked.

"Duck, men! Take care of your faces. We're goin' through it."

HANSEN'S voice died away as the car rose into a mixture of roaring-hot gases and stabbing flames. For a moment there was a blast of searing heat and strangling fumes, while the men wrapped their arms about their faces and forbore to breathe.

Then came relief. They were through. The car stopped abruptly on the fifteenth and topmost floor. Hansen flung the door open.

"Hurry! Hurry, now!"

And through furnace heat he ran to a standpipe at the corner of the shaft, where some hose was curled on a reel.

"It's all right, boys, we fight from here. It's the place to fight from. We'll show 'em all up—flood the damn fire down the stairway. Kelly, take the valve. All right? Now turn on the water."

Hansen had run the line out himself. He held the nozzle pointed through the smoke toward the reddish gleam at the top of the stairway. He whirled to look back at Kelly. "All right! Give us the water."

"It's on," said Kelly.

"What the hell?" staring at the flat line.

"I mean, it's on up here." Kelly's voice was a little shrill. "It must be turned off below."

Hansen, blistering with heat from without, felt a swift chill within. Trapped at the mercy of the ravening element they had been trained to fight! "These damn old shacks!" he muttered. Probably plumbers making repairs had turned off the water and left it so. He shrank from another passage through the fire, but there was no help for it.

"Come on!" he rasped. "Back to the elevator."

With his men crowded in behind him, he worked the crank with a still, steady hand. The car jarred and jerked once, and then stopped. Hansen remembered the sign, "Out of order," and opened the door and ran out.

"The stairway! Maybe—"

But a hot blast of fire coming up the stairway drove them all back. They huddled around Hansen, waiting for his leadership. He peered through the murky gloom at the high skylights and then toward the ends of the corridor.

There were no windows leading directly out. He started to give an order, and found some one had anticipated it. There was a crash, a splintering of wood, and a husky voice.

"Here's a way out, maybe."

It was Carter, who had smashed down a door. Something rankled in Hansen that the youngster had thought faster than he could, but he didn't resent it. It was a fireman's way.

"Come on!" Hansen led the way through the shattered door, pursued by another burst of flame. The fire would be in the room in a minute. But Carter had raised the window and was standing on the sill.

"We can get away on the ledge."

Again Hansen had been about to give the order. He had remembered a decorative coping around the building, no more than a foot wide. He ran to the window, saw the coping was flat on top, and gestured impatiently.

"All right. Go on."

But Carter dropped to the floor beside him, giving his place to another.

Had he lost his nerve? If he had, it was no wonder. Hansen and his mates had for long accepted the philosophy of death as an inevitable part of their work. But Carter was a kid—just a kid. The ledge was narrow and the drop below was deadly. He would go out with Carter and would give him a steadying hand. But when the rest had gone, Carter preceded Hansen without a word. Hansen followed at the tail of the line. The fire came through a minute later.

IT was a precarious situation. Below them, they could see nothing, nor could they be seen. Nothing but smoke, which gushed up from the floor below and billowed in the quiet air; it was as though they were looking down

into a vast, heaving sea. Strangling waves of it puffed up and immersed them.

Shouts and jangling of bells in the street sounded faint and unreal. They were in another world. There was no help but in themselves. And no help in themselves if they stayed here. They would drop off like singed flies, presently.

"A lifeline!" muttered Hansen to himself. "They could shoot it through a window. But they can't see the windows. Nor us."

They were facing the wall and edging along, inch after inch. If they could round the corner to the other side of the building, it might be better there. But now a call came back:

"Can't get any further. Ledge is broke off here."

Hansen craned his head backward and looked up. Well out of reach was the gutter of the roof coping. If one of them could reach it! There'd been a time when he could have reached it. A gust of hot ascending air brought flames with it. Hansen buried his face in the crook of his elbow. When he uncovered it, he saw that Carter had settled to a crouching position, face upward and arms stretched up, aiming at the gutter.

"He'll never make it," thought Hansen. And then, "He may make it."

Carter leaped and Hansen stepped quickly forward and thrust him up. There was a moment when, overbalanced by the thrust, Hansen weaved back and forth. He would have fallen if the man ahead hadn't pressed his hand against Hansen's back. Carter caught the gutter—he might have caught it anyway. He chinned himself up, threw a leg over the coping, and for a moment disappeared. Then one

of his arms came down full length toward Hansen.

"It's better up here. Come on. Can give you a hand."

"But you'll be dragged over."

"I've got hold of the edge of a skylight. Long as you don't drag too hard—"

"Kelly," Hansen spoke to the man ahead of him. "You first. And then you others. All of you."

By the time it came Hansen's turn he was nearly overpowered by the smoke. Carter was tired, too, and it seemed to Hansen at one time that he was about to pull Carter from the ledge. He loosened his grip, but Carter's grip tightened; and Hansen, with a mad convulsion, managed to scramble up. He found the men strung along the coping, with the tiled roof vibrating under them as though the fire was dragging at it.

"We can't stay here. There's a run-way over at the corner. Get to it and up to the peak. We'll see what's on the other side."

But on the other side there was no hope. Flames and smoke were ascending as out of a veritable crater, forming a black plume that bent over their heads. There was no retreat, nor could they remain here long. In a little while the entire roof would collapse.

A queer apathy had come over Hansen. For himself he had no great desire to escape. Save for the department, his life was empty. The madness of his youth had devastated his whole existence. He never spoke of heart-hunger, but he had it; it was the pain of his loneliness that made him a tyrant at times. Nor was there any cure for that loneliness. He was as faithful to the memory of the wife he had driven from him as he was to the department he served.

In dying for it, he would merge himself with it in a way. But he must save his men. He roused himself, rubbed his smoke-blinded eyes, and looked around.

"CAPTAIN HANSEN!" It was Carter calling.

He had crawled along the peak almost to the middle. He was kneeling by a chimney and pointing down to a thick electric cable which entered the roof at that point. Following an outward gesture, Hansen saw that the cable slanted steeply downward from the roof and across the street to the cupola of an eight-story building opposite.

Carter's voice came over the roaring of the fire. Something about "—a chance."

And something more. But that moment a section of roof beyond him went down with a mighty roar. The men couldn't hear what he said. They stared hungrily from him to the steep incline of cable, four hundred feet long. It was a passage from this death trap to life. But hot, strength-destroying smoke enveloped the nearer end of it. Even without the smoke, it was doubtful if any man could make it. Then Hansen shouted to him, waving his hand at Carter, who was busy at something.

"By heavens, he's got it. He's got it."

Carter, with deft, deliberate movements, was tearing his heavy rubber overcoat into broad, strong strips, and tying them together.

"That won't hold a man," said some one.

"No, but don't you see, it won't have to hold the whole weight," Hansen pointed out. "Just help hold him from slidin' too fast along the cable."

He can hold some with his hands. And a belt around him, under his arms, will fasten him to the cable. Get busy, boys. Tear up your coats and make one long rope."

As they worked, there came a mighty sound of rending and grinding. Followed a vast uproar, as another larger section of the front of the roof went inward, cutting its way through the burning floors. The men looked at each other, wondering which one would go first, knowing that the latest to leave might not leave at all. When the pieces were knotted together—it took all of their coats to make a line long enough—Hansen crept to Carter's side.

"You first, Carter. It's your idea. Just slip your belt up under your arm-pits and buckle it around the cable if it's long enough—no, better take my belt, too."

Carter's smoke-blackened features crinkled into an odd grin. "Why not you first, captain?"

"Then," Hansen turned swiftly, "the married men with children. You first, Kelly. You've got five."

They fastened Kelly to the cable with his belt and lashed one end of the line around his shoulders. They paid the line out fast as he slid down the cable, and then checked him a bit with the line, so he wouldn't be injured by crashing against the cupola. He landed safe and cast off, buckling the belt again around the cable and they drew it up with the rubber line.

So man after man was lowered to safety, until only Hansen, Carter and two other unmarried men were left. The two like Carter were intruding newcomers, the commissioner's "pets"; they hadn't whimpered as death came nearer and nearer with the falling of the roof; and Hansen beck-

oned to the nearest. "Your turn now—and I want you to forget some of the things I've said."

"It's his turn," the man said, pointing to Carter. "He thought of it."

But Carter had moved away and turned his back.

The man took his turn, and his companion made the next trip. Hansen drew the line back. They had worked fast, driven by the deathly heat, suffocating gases, and the imminent collapse of the roof. No rescue efforts from below were apparent. The next man down would be the last. The man who remained would have no one to lower him away.

"ALL right, Carter," said Hansen sharply.

He thrust the lifebelt at Carter, with a stubborn look, reached for the end of the line to pay it out as Hansen should go down.

"It's no good," said Hansen, withholding it. "You do down, you understand!"

"I'll get down all right," said Carter in a muffled voice. "But you're going now."

"Like hell I am! I'm captain, do you understand? I've got to go last. Obey my order."

"But I can get down." Suddenly Carter's voice flamed. "I'm young and strong. I can save myself. I can go hand over hand down that cable."

"No man livin' can do it," said Hansen. "Not after all this smoke. I want you to go first *because* you're young. Listen, boy! Your life's before you. And I'm an old guy with my life behind me and," suddenly exploding, "I don't give a damn! For the last twenty years— Boy, take warnin'."

Carter had crept closer. His eyes were glowing out of a soot-blackened face. "You mean?" he said.

Hansen spoke fiercely. How could he make this boy understand! "I mean that twenty years ago I ended my real life. When I drove my wife Elsie out, and some one else, too. Some one that was part of me. I didn't know about it then. When I found out, 'twas too late—they'd disappeared. I couldn't find them then. But get on—get down this cable! Why—what you tremblin' for?"

"I thought—I thought you were different."

"Damn it! What's that got to do with it? Get down."

"I pulled strings to get into your company. I wanted to know you, but I was sure I'd hate you. And I did hate you. But now—"

"What the dévil! But no time—tell me on the ground. Get down!"

Hansen reached forward with the lifebelt. But Carter evaded it. Hansen stopped and stared into Carter's eyes. The strangeness of Carter's last words had come to him. They brought him a new, almost paralyzing idea. Fantastic—or was it commonplace? Incredible—or was it certain? Explanatory of everything, certainly—of everything that had puzzled him about the boy. The name "Carter" meant nothing. Elsie might have married again, taken another name. He must know. He must know before he died.

"Boy, who are you? Are—are you my son?"

Crash! With lightning swiftness Carter leaned forward and struck with all the strength and weight of his body behind his fist.

The blow caught Hansen's jaw. It stretched him on the roof. But quickly

as consciousness passed, Hansen had time to realize that the life-giving blow was the best answer to his question.

As Hansen sank down, Carter bent and swiftly looped the belt around the captain's chest and over the cable. Fastening the line to Hansen's shoulders, Carter braced himself on the roof and lowered away.

Hansen recovered when very near the cupola below, and leaped upon it, raving.

"A lifeline! A slidin' whip. My boy's up there. My boy that I never saw."

"Steady, captain, steady!" It was the deputy talking. He had just mounted from the street, and behind him were men with a great length of rope and a pulley contrivance in the loop of it.

A great shout arose. Carter barely heard it. He was leaning against the chimney amid the smoke and the stabbing flames. The strain of lowering Hansen had taken his strength and it was returning very slowly. Hungry for life now, he strained his eyes through the murk to see what they were shouting about.

To their end of the line which he still held, they were fastening something. The word "Pull!" came to him. He pulled steadily up. There was a pulley and a double length of rope. With the instinct of a fire-fighter's son, he saw their use instantly.

"Now, if the chimney holds," he muttered, as he lashed the pulley to it, and himself to the cable and the rope.

And, supported by both the cable and the revolving rope—which was a belt between two pulleys and was controlled by the men below—he slid down to life and to his father.



*The loyal slave swung one mighty fist against
the jaw of his master's foe*

The Hawk of Hazard

Driven into the open, Ginter, Arkansas saloon-keeper, plays a bold and desperate game to outwit Allan Campbell, adventurous knight of the Old South

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

Author of "It's a Bargain!" "The Photographin' Fool," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ALLAN CAMPBELL, Mississippi gentleman, has been adventuring for several years with his enormous slave Tangle-eye. His extreme sense of gentlemanly honor, his disregard for danger, and his deadliness with the pistol have won him a wide but unfair reputation. All the river, in these eighteen-fifties, knows him as the Mississippi Hawk.

At Belle Point, Arkansas, he makes a deadly enemy of Fred Ginter, pseudo-gentleman and saloon owner. Ginter has his Oklahoma killer, Purse Venier, steal one of Campbell's matched dueling pistols, and a personal card. He forges a challenge to George Claybourne, signing Campbell's name; and sends Venier at dead of night to bring Claybourne to MacNelly's Island.

This story began in the *Argosy* for October 19.

There Ginter shoots Claybourne, and lays in his dead hand the duelling pistol, from which the charge of powder has been extracted.

The card is found, and Campbell is accused of murder. But Laurence Stevens, cotton gin owner whom Ginter was blackmailing and whom Campbell had saved, proves an alibi. Uncle Matt Woodruff, Claybourne's brother-in-law, a gruff and forthright frontier gentleman, believes in Campbell's innocence; but Irene Claybourne, realizing that her father must have thought he was facing Campbell if he died in a duel, calls the Hawk a murderer. Cut to the heart, Campbell swears he will make her apologize on bended knees.

He gets a confession from the dying Venier, and lays a trap for Ginter. But that wily plotter, realizing the game is up, abducts Irene and rides West.

Uncle Matt and Lieutenant Metclaff, a hot-headed young cavalryman who is a suitor for Irene's hand, start westward with a posse, leaving behind them the Hawk, who is in bed with two wounds inflicted by Ginter's hired assassins.

CHAPTER XIX—(Continued).

NEMESIS PURSUES.

WITH one movement he flung the bedding aside and swung his feet to the floor. He was on his feet before the negro could reach him.

"Lawd, Marse Allan!" cried the black man in fear. "Yo'll kill yo'self, honey. Yo' ain' fittin' to go nowhere—"

"Get my clothes!" thundered his master. Thinking aloud, he said: "Against such a trickster as Ginter,

when he has made no preparations for a departure from this country, this is certainly no time to do the obvious."

Moaning to himself, the negro laid out a fresh suit of gray and helped the Hawk to attire himself. If every move was a torture to Campbell, no one else could have detected it. He handled himself stiffly, but with no appearance of pain or suffering or weakening of vitality. Fully dressed, and armed with the guns which the day before had saved his life, he walked steadily toward the hallway.

"Bring the bull whip!" he said to the anxious negro. "Come!"

Together they descended the stairs and left the hostelry.

"What we gwine do, Marse Allan?" inquired the black man in a meek rumble.

"Find Fred Ginter, if we have to flay every man-jack of his alive. To the Palace!"

To the Palace they went, forthwith. Joe Tracy was behind the bar. As soon as his eyes fell upon this menacing little procession, he fell to trembling violently. He recalled the affair of Ferguson with astonishing vividness. Without waiting to learn what Campbell wanted he turned and fled. The Hawk merely pointed his finger at the man.

Tangle-eye leaped forward and swirled his long, black whip. He cracked it once. The vicious lash hissed through the air and the end wrapped itself about one flying leg of the bartender as the man left the protection of the counter in search of safety through the rear door. The giant negro pulled back against the jerk, in the approved fashion of cowpony and recalcitrant steer, as Joe crashed to the floor.

The jerk of some one hundred and

seventy pounds hardly jarred the braced Tangle-eye, while it completely stunned the victim. The latter lay still as the negro held the whip taut so that the end of the lash would not uncoil. At his master's bidding Tangle-eye hauled in the whip hand over hand, dragging the prone Joe unceremoniously across the rough and splintery floor.

When the Hawk bent over the man Joe was in a state of complete submission.

"Where is Ginter at this moment?" hissed Campbell, the finality of his tones indicating that he would not take the trouble to repeat his question without the application of his terrible bull-whip.

"Before Heaven I dunno," chattered Joe. "Be merciful, sir. When I told him about you an' Venier this mornin' he said for me to come back here an' leave the matter to him. I ain't seen 'im since. Honest I don't know where he went or why; but when I went down to Venier's shanty-boat later just to see where he'd been killed, th' boat was gone. I swear that's all I know."

"So?" the Hawk smiled terribly. "And at what time did you seek to appease your curiosity at the river?"

"You mean, when was the boat mis-sin'? I reckon it was ten o'clock when I went down to see it, sir. Maybe it just broke loose—the river's still high. I dunno, sir. I swear—"

"Turn him loose," the Hawk cut in, speaking to the waiting Tangle. "I learned all I want to know, and fàr more quickly than I had hoped. Come!"

HE led the way down to the landing. Tangle-eye followed dumbly. They first verified Joe Tracy's statement. Purse Venier's disreputable shanty-boat had disappeared from

the face of the river. At the steam-boat landing a few questions brought out the information that the wanigan had been seen floating downstream about nine o'clock with two men aboard. The spectators had taken for granted that one of them was Venier.

Campbell thanked his informants and walked along the wharves surveying the various skiffs and small craft, Tangle-eye padding along behind. That he did not find what he was seeking was evident in the fact that he continued making his way along the warehouses that stretched southward along Piccadilly Street. Then he was deterred by the approach of a man from the direction of the Dixie House. It was Laurence Stevens.

"Say," burst out the gin owner as soon as he came within hailing distance. "What kind of a game do you play with your friends? Ever since yesterday that monstrous black of yours wouldn't let me in to see you because of your condition, and when I make another call this afternoon I find you out on another rampage."

"My friend, I am sorry," replied Campbell briefly. "And I don't mean to be curt now, but I am truly engaged in a matter that means more than life itself to me. I cannot talk to you now."

Stevens became serious at once.

"What is it?" he demanded. "You have but to command me."

"Fred Ginter has abducted Irene Claybourne," responded the Hawk in a bleak voice. "He has outwitted Woodruff and the sheriff by leaving the impression that he rode westward from the Claybourne plantation. That was only a ruse. In reality he rode down along the river with two spare horses—perhaps three—and met two of his men who floated Venier's shanty-boat down to a point opposite the Claybourne

property. Instead of riding over the western range, he has carried the poor girl down the river. I suppose he intends to hold her as a hostage against his own life—for he is the murderer of her father. I am looking for a light craft which is speedy enough to overtake him. If you would help me, Stevens, tell me quickly where I can find one."

Stevens did not take time to show his astonishment at the news. He merely looked at his friend in pity because of the plight of the young woman.

"I can do better than that," he said. "I have an Indian canoe down at the gin, and a pair of willing arms with which to paddle. Come with me."

They hurried down the street. At the gin Stevens was as good as his word. He exhibited a light birch canoe, a slenderly graceful thing built for speed, which he kept up on the rafters of a shed.

"I bought that from an Indian a couple of years ago," he explained as Tangle-eye lowered the light craft to the ground. "It is faster than any skiff on the river hereabouts. Put it in the water, Tangle-eye, while I get the paddles."

STEVENS came back in a moment with a pair of ash paddles which he had had made for his own use.

"Take the middle, Campbell," he directed. "Don't forget that you are wounded. Can you paddle a canoe well, Tangle-eye? If not, you had better remain behind."

"Tangle is an expert," said Campbell. "He will handle the craft without any assistance, Stevens."

"But I am going," said the gin owner quickly.

"No, my friend," vetoed Campbell, laying a kindly hand on the other's arm.

"This is my quarrel solely. In the second place, my reasoning may be at fault. You don't know how glad I was to see you awhile ago. I have told you all that I can. I want you to stay here at Belle Point and watch for Ginter. He may have fooled us all. In case he returns before I overtake him, I want some one to be here to handle him.

"Remember that Woodruff and the sheriff have gone off with a posse. So has Metclaff who, by the way, is nearly frantic with grief. That leaves no one to guard against a possible doubling back except my friend, Laurence Stevens. Will you stay for me?"

Stevens grimaced, but seeing the wisdom in the Hawk's request, he reluctantly nodded.

"I'll stay," he agreed, "because I believe you are right, but I hate to do it. What will you do if you overtake Ginter and find that he has a dozen men with him?"

"He won't have," prophesied the Hawk. "It doesn't pay to have too many servitors know one's business. Ginter proved that he has learned this lesson by the way he handled the Claybourne murder. *Au revoir*, my good friend."

He took his place in the bow of the craft and Tangle-eye managed to get his great bulk in the rear of the canoe somewhat astern of the center. The negro dipped his paddle and heaved his shoulders. The frail bark shot outward into the current and headed downstream, Stevens waving *bon voyage* from the gin wharf.

"Tangle," said his master without turning his head, "the houseboat has three hours and one mile the advantage of us. But it can only float, whereas we can travel three or four times as

fast. There are some four hours of daylight left to us. Tangle, you are to overtake that boat before dark! If you have ever had great strength and greater endurance in those black muscles of yours, show it now."

"Ah can paddle cleah down to de Mississip' without stoppin', if dat am what yo' wants, Marse Allan."

"But you must do it before dark," reiterated the Hawk. "After night has fallen we would pass them unknowingly in the dark. Conserve your strength, but *overtake that boat.*"

Tangle-eye did not answer with his voice. His reply was apparent in the impetus given each stroke of his flashing paddle. The well-seasoned blade bent like a bow with each mighty sweep. Like an arrow, as skillfully handled as by an Indian, the canoe sped down the river. In the glare of the westering sun the sweat poured in great drops off the immense human engine, making his black skin glisten like polished ebony.

In the prow of the birch craft, his face as set as graven granite, his finely formed body as immobile as though really turned to stone, sat the Hawk. The bandaging about his throat, now that a lacy white shirt fitted snugly at the neck, resembled a linen stock. It was impossible to tell that here was a wounded man who should have been in bed.

CAMPBELL said no more as mile after mile of the winding ribbon of water passed behind them. He faced the front, his keen blue eyes sweeping the stream and its banks, overlooking no craft of any type, ever seeking the familiar outline of the Vernier wanigan. Having delivered his command, he waited for its consummation with the stoicism of the red man

who had made the craft he was using.

One hour succeeded another as the canoe shot downstream with no cessation of speed. Slowly the sun lowered toward the horizon with no sign of the quarry. Once only did they slacken speed, late in the afternoon, while Campbell bespoke a government quarterboat at a bend in the river where they were rip-rapping the bank. Here they learned that the shanty-boat had passed not thirty minutes previous. The scent was growing warmer. They were gaining much faster than Campbell had expected.

The Hawk had not taken into consideration the time Ginter had lost in laying a blind trail by his westward ride. Thus, before the sun dipped completely behind the western hills to leave the world in the brief twilight of October, they sighted the houseboat ahead of them, leisurely drifting with the current.

One man sat atop the roof of the little craft at the long sweep which was mounted as a rudder. No one else was in sight. It was not until they drew alongside that Campbell saw the second man on the foredeck as a lookout. The man at the great oar was lazily smoking while he steered the drifting craft with one hand. He paid scant attention to the lonely, insignificant canoe until retribution was almost upon them. When he recognized the form of the Mississippi Hawk, he started to his feet with a hoarse shout of warning that came too late.

Nemesis was upon him. Campbell leaped aboard the wanigan and started toward the bow. He pointed one hand at the man on the roof who was struggling to jerk out a gun.

"Take him, Tangle!", he commanded.

The giant negro leaped to the firmer footing of the shanty-boat and whirled his long whip about his head as the man on the roof leveled his gun. The crack of the whip and the roar of the six-shooter were simultaneous. The bullet buried itself in the deck between Tangle-eye's feet as the whip coiled about the gunman's wrist. With a wild shriek the fellow felt himself being jerked from the roof as though he were merely the weighted tip at the end of a Russian lash. His gun clattered to the deck as he was flung in a low arc over his captor's head and plunged into the river with a mighty splash.

Keeping the whip taut, Tangle-eye hauled it in and pulled the fellow out of the water like a great, gasping catfish.

When the slave released him, the fellow lay on the deck and moaned with pain. He was out of the battle with a dislocated shoulder.

Making sure that the man was unarmed, Tangle-eye kicked his gun into the river. Then, placing one hand on the great sweep and the other on the edge of the roof, the huge black swung himself to the spot from whence he had just removed his captive. Running forward over the roof, he looked down on the foredeck, just in time to see the lookout lunging at his master with an oar. As Campbell sidestepped the vicious thrust and drew a gun to pistol the man, Tangle-eye leaped downward, landing squarely on the fellow's shoulders and crushing him to the deck beneath him.

But this ruffian was made of sterner stuff than his confederate. The roof of the shanty-boat was so low that he had nothing but the weight of this new antagonist to sustain. He was stunned, but not subdued. He fought like a demon in the slave's grasp.

Campbell, without a backward glance, jerked open the door of the cabin.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GAMBLE SUPREME.

AT first Irene Claybourne had been too frightened at her abduction and the memory of what she had seen to think coherently. Then, as the minutes lengthened into an hour, she grew calmer. Alone in the squalid cabin of Venier's unclean houseboat, her fright gave way before anger, genuine Woodruff anger.

When her captor found time to seek her company he had a very stormy interview on his hands. Ginter finally managed to make it clear that he was offering his hand in marriage. Her refusal was so indignant that he left her for some time to consider the situation, then returned and suavely repeated the offer.

"You may carry me as far as New Orleans," she flung at him, "but I will never consent to such a ridiculous, degrading union."

Ginter controlled himself with an effort. "My dear girl, you'll be damned glad to marry me by to-morrow morning."

Irene was too angry for fear. She merely looked her unutterable contempt out of flashing eyes.

Her silent scorn burned into the man's very soul. In it he felt all the pride of class superiority which had ever rankled in his bosom. Yet, once more, he fought for self-control, and made an impassioned plea that he loved her, would go to any lengths to win her.

He was almost kneeling to her now, close enough for a wave of perfume

from his pomaded hair to cloy her nostrils.

It was such a ridiculous situation—like a scene from a farce or a melodrama. Her anger and contempt gave way before amusement, and she laughed in his face, a contemptuous laugh that stung a thousand times worse than her angry disdain.

Her piquant face was rendered even more alluring by her mood. The laugh did not detract one whit from the beauty of her lovely bare neck and shoulders.

Ginter had taken her just after she had dressed for dinner in a soft black gown of extremely low neck that gave an alluring view of her creamy shoulders. It was really a ballroom gown that she had donned because it was black crape over white satin. If anything, the mourning dress enhanced her beauty.

Her laughter goaded the man to madness. He swept her into his arms and bent his head until his lips rested in burning contact with the cool flesh of her shoulder.

He began kissing her wildly, heedless of her frantic struggles and protests and the quivering skin that shrank beneath his caresses.

It was at this moment that the man on the roof uttered his hoarse cry and fired his pistol. The sound went unheeded.

Swept away by the paroxysm of his passion, the blood pounding madly in his temples, Ginter continued to bend over his struggling prey, pressing her cruelly against him.

Irene gave herself up for lost. Her eyes darted wildly about the cabin in search of aid. She did not waste breath in screams, but battled silently and furiously against him. It was all she could do to keep the bodice of her

gown from being torn from her shoulders.

SHE felt her strength failing. It was just as she closed her eyes with a prayer on her white lips that Allan Campbell jerked open the cabin door. This sound, coming hard on the heels of the pistol shot, penetrated the saloon owner's inflamed brain, his mind having unconsciously registered the explosion without heeding it. Now he raised his blazing eyes to find himself staring in the face of the man he feared more than all others in the world.

The swift change in his attitude communicated itself to the fainting girl. She opened her eyes and perceived that Ginter was staring across her shoulder. Twisting her head, she saw the reason. Never had Irene Claybourne been as glad to see any one in her life.

She twisted herself free of Ginter's stiff arms and reeled toward one of the windows of the little cabin. Ginter, his lips drawn back from his white teeth, his black mustache awry and bristling, stood like a wild animal at bay.

Campbell was no longer sane. The sight of the saloon man's foul lips showering kisses on those incomparable shoulders had driven him mad. Never, as long as he lived, would he forget that horrible sight. He forgot that he wanted to take Ginter alive, he forgot that he was wounded. For the first time in his life he lusted to kill a man and tear out his heart with bare hands.

It was this temporary insanity that saved Ginter's life from immediate annihilation.

The Hawk was the first to speak.

"Not satisfied with murder, you try

to steal your victim's daughter?" he grated.

"You lie!" cried Ginter in a voice of fear. "I didn't kill him!"

"I have Purse Venier's dying confession. *You* are the assassin of George Claybourne. And you are on your way to Claybourne now to plead for the mercy you didn't show him."

The Hawk lunged forward to grapple with his foe, dropping the gun he held as though it had been a useless straw. Ginter, his natural weasel wits sharpened by the fear of violent death, was quick to see his advantage. Readily he closed with the man he knew to be twice wounded.

"What of it? Yes, and I paid the Shirleys to kill you," he snarled savagely. "I'll finish that job myself now!"

At this complete admission of his crimes, with the additional boast of a fourth that had so nearly succeeded, the brain of the watching girl could stand no more. With a little moan from the depths of her very soul, she crumpled to the floor in a dead faint.

Neither man was aware of it. Each was seeking to kill after the fashion of jungle things, hot with the passionate lust to slay, falling into depths beneath the shadow of Cain. The fear was just as vitally alive in Ginter's heart as before, but, at handgrips with his Nemesis, it only urged him to the heights of fury.

Once more was the inscrutable mask stripped from Allan Campbell's soul. He wanted to kill this thing for Irene and lay it at her feet in swift retribution. Merciful indeed was the swoon that claimed Irene in this primitive hour.

While the battle raged in the cabin another struggle still went on on the

foredeck. Unguided and unheeded the wanigan drifted down the bosom of the angry river.

The man with the dislocated shoulder had managed to drag himself to the stem of the boat. Seeing his comrade almost strangled, he succeeded in striking the giant negro once across the head with the neglected oar. Before he could repeat the blow the stunned negro swept out with one mighty arm and gathered him into a triangular grapple. The man howled with pain, but Tangle-eye held the two of them fast in his awful grip while his head slowly cleared of the mist. Then he proceeded to conquer both of his antagonists with a thoroughness which eventually left them crushed and unconscious against the bulkhead of the cabin while the exhausted negro, already having been close to the limit of endurance by the hours of paddling, staggered erect and sobbed for breath. He could do no more.

TARDILY Campbell came to a realization of his mistake in coming to a hand-to-hand combat with his enemy while in such a wounded condition. Ginter's muscular arms wrapped themselves about his body in a belt of pain. The agony was excruciating, bringing beads of cold sweat to his pale forehead. The granulating wound in his side reopened and a deadly red stain widened upon his shirt in a growing circle.

That Ginter was aware of this he could tell by the evil triumph in the man's eyes. If the villain now succeeded in injuring the wound in his neck the Hawk knew that it would be the end. Even his indomitable will could not command his body to withstand such racking, weakening pain and loss of blood.

He forced himself to bear the agony in his side with a fortitude that was little short of superhuman. Hampered in his movements by the necessity of protecting his stiff neck, he fought to keep Ginter from tumbling them to the floor. In such a rough threshing about he could not hope to survive. Though his titanic rage remained unabated, the light of sanity returned to his pain-brightened eyes.

For long moments they swayed there on their feet, locked in deadly embrace. Feeling his strength ebbing away with each biting stab of that pain which was spreading over his entire body, Campbell made the supreme gamble of his career.

Knowing that if Ginter were to take advantage of his opportunity and shift his grip to his antagonist's throat he would be dead in less than sixty seconds, Campbell uttered a faint groan that was not forced and relaxed in his opponent's arms. He went completely limp, utterly at the mercy of his cowardly enemy and with full cognizance of the man's capacity for brutality and treachery. With the remembrance of Metclaff's bruised, bloody face in his mind, the Hawk nevertheless played his last card unfalteringly.

As the body of the Hawk sagged in his grasp, black laughter gurgled up from the throat of the victor. Knowing exactly what he had done for the Hawk's side, and realizing that Campbell was a man whose will carried his body onward until he dropped dead, he did exactly as Campbell had hoped. He did not take the trouble to choke the Hawk. He was certain that he had already killed him, and tossed the body of his enemy to one side. He could mutilate it later; right now he must see what had happened to his boatmen, and if there were other attackers.

His laugh now ringing exultantly free, Ginter picked up Campbell's discarded pistol and stepped toward the door. A faint rustling movement caused him to whirl swiftly about. The Hawk was propped up on his left elbow, his second six-shooter in his right hand and just coming free from its holster. With an exclamation of angry dismay Ginter jerked up his gun and fired at the man on the floor.

But at this sort of business the Hawk was his master, no matter how badly wounded. He merely flipped up the barrel of his gun and pulled the trigger before he had a chance to aim. His bullet left the muzzle of his gun a split second before that of Ginter's. And the saloon man's weapon clattered to the floor as he fell back with a shattered wrist. The Hawk had gambled with his life again, and had outplayed his enemy by taking a chance that Ginter would never have dared to take.

Howling in craven fear, Ginter snatched open the door of the cabin to run from an inescapable fate, and plunged straight into the arms of the incoming Tangle-eye. The negro, still gasping for breath and not feeling equal to another combat, promptly subdued him by swinging one mighty fist against his jaw. Thus deprived of the quick, merciful death of a bullet, Fred Ginter collapsed to the floor in an ignominious heap, saved for the scaffold.

SLOWLY Campbell pulled himself to his feet and staggered over to the crumpled little silken heap beneath the window. He waved his slave back imperiously, then leaned over and with infinite pain lifted Irene to her feet. Propping himself against the bulkhead, he held her in his arms just

as he had once before many, many nights ago on the quivering deck of a moonlit steamer. With one hand he gently raised her lolling head until it rested on his shoulder.

Her lovely, disarrayed hair cascaded over his arm in a chestnut waterfall. Her eyes were closed, her face could have been no paler in death. For a long moment Campbell feasted his eyes on her pallid beauty.

"Irene, Irene," he murmured in a voice of longing. "How dearly I love you!"

Then he bent his lips closer and closer to hers. Again, as once before on a moonlit deck, he almost kissed her. Once more he hesitated and then drew back. But it was not the superfine breeding of a gentleman who did not take advantage of a lady's lips unless they were offered; he had earned the right to kiss her. It was the memory of Ginter devouring her creamy shoulders against her will that held Campbell back from a kiss that he desired more than anything else in the world at that moment.

Abruptly he raised his head and held out her senseless form to his slave. "Bear her out into the air, Tangle."

The great negro obeyed with the tenderness one might bestow on the most fragile orchid. He carried the unconscious girl out into the twilight in time to see an upriver steamboat rounding the next bend and whistling warningly at the erratic little craft that drifted toward her bows.

"Marse Allan! Marse Allan!" belated Tangle-eye, "heah am a steamboat gwine up de rivah jes' in time to carry us back."

But his master was beyond the sound of his voice. As the black man had stepped out of the foul little cabin Campbell succumbed to the terrible

agony that claimed him. He pitched, senseless, to the floor.

CHAPTER XXI.

GENTLEMEN OF CHIVALRY.

WHEN Campbell came to himself it was dark about him, and he was wandering along the black avenues of pain. He lay still for a long space, his brows knit, as he sought to recall what had transpired. Slowly memory came back to him. He had just told his slave to take Irene out to the fresh air on deck. He listened intently. Even on the floor of the cabin he should be able to hear the roily water lapping against the sides of the wanigan whether the craft was still in motion or snubbed against the bank by Tangle-eye.

He heard nothing. All was quiet. Then he moved—and found himself in the familiar soft feather bed of the massive four-poster in his suite at the Dixie House. He cried out in consternation. Had that flight down the river after Ginter been nothing but a delirious dream?

Before he could worry longer the door of his bedchamber opened quickly at his cry, letting in a rectangle of soft light from the lamp in the antechamber. Matt Woodruff and Tangle-eye hastened to the bedside.

"Are you awake, son?" queried the old man softly.

"I am, sir," replied Campbell weakly. "Tell me, have I been only dreaming?"

"You have not," assured Woodruff. "Tangle-eye, fetch the doctor. He's downstairs. Jes' lie quiet, son."

"What time is it?" murmured the Hawk.

"It's Saturday night," snapped Matt

irritably. "You've been dead to the world for more'n twenty-four hours."

While the fussy little doctor lighted a lamp and went over his body, Campbell lay quiescent, marveling at the length of his latest coma. He could not know how Irene had sat by his berth in the steamboat that had picked them up, sat there watching and praying through the long hours of the night as the boat throbbed toward Belle Point.

"He'll pull through nicely and quickly if gangrene doesn't set in," the doctor decided. "Bathe him off with vinegar water, give him cool water to drink, and keep him perfectly quiet."

Dr. Wilson bustled out of the chamber, Campbell turned his eyes on Woodruff.

"I'll go right to sleep and give you no trouble," he murmured, "if you will tell me how matters stand. Is it a bargain?"

The old man frowned thoughtfully. Then he nodded.

"All right," he growled. "You'd worry a saint into a tantrum before you'd give up. You an' Irene an' your prisoners were picked up by the Nancy Lee and brought back early this mornin'. Lucky for you she was a day ahead o' her schedule. Ginter has signed a complete confession, an' everybody in town is clamorin' for a sight of you. Now, shut your peepers an' go to sleep. Maybe you can have comp'ny in the mornin'."

"No one else has inquired about me?" asked Campbell hesitantly.

"Didn't I tell you they was to be no questions?" said Matt testily. "I done said *everybody* wanted to see you, didn't I? Give him a drink, Tangle-eye. An' then you go to sleep, young feller. I'm stayin' here to watch you, but I've got to git some rest myself."

The twinkle in Woodruff's eye was a sufficient answer for the Hawk. With a sigh of vast contentment he closed his eyes.

THE next day Campbell had Tangle-eye shave and bathe him and change his linens. Then he occupied himself by perusing the columns of Saturday's *Herald*. His vindication had been complete. His name, besides being cleared of all stigma, was now synonymous with the highest heroism.

At the sound of carriage wheels he had Tangle-eye slip his dressing gown on him. Then he lay back with flushed cheeks and brightened eyes to await his callers. He could not hear the silvery voice for which he longed.

The figure of Lieutenant Metclaff appeared in the bedroom doorway, resplendent in a clean uniform with saber at his side and in full regalia. Under his left arm he carried a flat, rectangular package.

A couple of stitches had been taken over one temple and courtplaster adorned the bridge of his nose and his chin. He was pale and his face was lined with pain. But he was almost the handsome, dashing young officer of yore.

He removed his army hat stiffly and bowed, then stood erect with his face gone white from pain. His proud black eyes rested full upon the Hawk's wondering face.

"Sir," he began with difficulty, biting out the words distinctly and slowly as he all but gritted his teeth to hide his pain. "My first duty here is to offer you my unconditional apology for all that I have said and thought about you. You are undoubtedly a gentleman whose company it is a privilege to enjoy. I deeply regret my youthful im-

pulsiveness, and I am here to place myself at your service."

"Ah!" breathed Campbell in understanding, his eyes resting on the flat package for a brief instant. "I accept your apology, sir, in full extenuation of the differences between us. Lieutenant Metclaff, I have no further quarrel with you."

Metclaff was taken aback for a moment. Then, incredulously: "If you refuse to exercise your privilege of calling on me, then I must demand satisfaction from you for that insult with your handkerchief in the court room."

"I apologize unreservedly," answered Campbell. "I can be no less courteous than you."

"Sir," replied the army man stiffly; "I refuse to accept your apology. I hold you to your promise."

Campbell's eyes flashed in quiet anger.

"Very well," he replied abruptly. "Consider me at your service within the next ten days."

"No," said Metclaff surprisingly, "I hold you to your word to-day—now."

"Are you crazy?" asked the Hawk.

"I trust I am perfectly sane," replied the lieutenant haughtily. "I realize that you are in no condition to seek a more secluded spot. However, this room is long enough to accommodate us by the moving of a piece or two of furniture. Your negro can act as a referee and a witness. Since you have refused to challenge me I must, to show you that I am taking no advantage of your condition, make a humiliating confession. In being assaulted while in an unconscious state three of my right ribs were broken by a brutal kick and my collar bone was fractured. It is impossible for me to use my right

hand. Surely this compensates for the wounds you have received."

"Don't you know that my wounds have not affected my gun practice? I thought I had proved that. It would be murder for you to stand before me," snorted Campbell impatiently.

"Not so. I am somewhat of a marksman myself, sir. And I am fairly expert with my left hand. I have brought my duelling pistols with me, and I demand your immediate service in the name of honor."

"And what if I refuse?"

Metclaff's face twisted in anger.

"You—you—" he began. Then, controlling his hot temper with an effort: "A gentleman cannot refuse his obligations, Allan Campbell."

CAMPBELL contemplated the other, his brow darkening in anger at the obstinacy of the proud young fool. Then he reached a swift decision.

"Very well," he agreed tersely. "I will accommodate you. Tangle! Clear the room quickly!"

The anxious negro opened his mouth to protest.

"Do as I bade you!" crisped out his master. "Not a word out of you!"

Trembling in dismay, Tangle-eye began moving the pieces of furniture out of the middle of the floor. Campbell carefully placed his feet on the floor and stood erect. The Hawk loaded the pistols while Metclaff limply measured the floor.

"Five paces each from the center of the chamber are all the steps we can have room for," calculated Metclaff. "If you will instruct your man?"

"He understands his duties in the duello thoroughly," replied the Hawk. "Tangle, take your position!"

Groaning audibly, the negro moved

forward to start the mad duellists. He dared not disobey, but he prayed for an interruption.

"One word," said Metclaff as he placed his back against that of the man in the dressing gown. "I suspect you of some quixotic trickery, Campbell. I warn you that I shall shoot to kill. If you trick me I shall insist on a second trial immediately."

"Both pistols are fully loaded, sir," answered the Hawk coldly. "I assure you that I have not the least intention of throwing my life away by any foolishness."

He meant just that. Unable to understand why the young officer insisted on such a duel, he had seen no solution to the matter save to accept and merely wound the mad fool in the combat. If, as Metclaff had told him, the lieutenant was a good shot he would be risking his life to do so. But there was no sense in killing the tempestuous officer. Allan Campbell had hoped to live the balance of his life without shedding another drop of human blood, yet hard on the heels of this resolution came this crack-brained young spitfire who insisted on a duel.

There was a strained silence. Then:

"Tangle!" spoke the Hawk sharply. "Give the word!"

"Gen'lemen, is you-all ready?" quavered the negro in a sorrowful voice. At their brief nods he resumed: "Yo' will walk fo'ward five paces as Ah count them off. When Ah say 'Turn,' yo' will turn 'round an' fiah at yo' own discretion. Set yo'selves! *One!*"

The two men who stood back to back, arms at their sides, their pistols butt to butt, made the first step. The voice of Tangle-eye was so long in counting the second stride that they nearly lost their balance, and Campbell hissed sharply in disapproval. The

negro dared not procrastinate longer. Resigning himself to the inevitable, Tangle-eye counted out the paces as fast as a man could pace them with dignity.

"Two! Three! Foah! Five! Tw—"

"Here!" bellowed a mad voice from the door. "What the hell's goin' on? Stop it right now, or I'll cut loose on the pair o' you. Tangle-eye! Put your master back to bed. John Metclaff, what the devil are you doin' here? You are supposed to be in bed with some busted ribs. By thunder, I won't have no more nonsense!"

Metclaff turned furious eyes on the interrupting Woodruff.

"You overstep the bounds of nicety, Mr. Woodruff," he gritted. "Please withdraw. This is a private affair of honor."

"The hell I do!" retorted Uncle Matt courteously. "The idea o' two galoots who ought to be flat on their backs bein' up an' tomcattin' about! Git back in bed, Allan, before I lose my temper. As for you, John, I seen you git a carriage an' drive off. As soon as I could git away from the women folks without alarmin' them I followed you, you thet rode a hoss all night with a caved-in side thet you never told us about. What in hell is all this about, I say? Allan! John! Answer me, damn it!"

Perforce, Campbell made no reply. He replaced his pistol on the table and seated himself on the edge of the bed, collapsing weakly as soon as he let himself go.

"Bless goodness!" cried the negro happily. "Yo' is de most welcome sight in de world, Marse Woodruff. Praise Gawd! Make 'em behave demselves. Tangle-eye couldn't do nothin' wid 'em. Dey wouldn't listen to dis niggah."

"Waal?" snapped Matt at the recalcitrant Metclaff. "What's it all about? What's the meanin' of this?"

THE lieutenant drew himself up and eyed the old man proudly.

"Sir," he replied stiffly, "you should know as well as I. It was in my bedchamber not three hours ago that you announced the greatly improved condition of Mr. Campbell. You heard Miss Claybourne declare that she was coming to him at once to make her humble apology upon her knees. That, if you will remember, was the manner in which Campbell swore he would have it that morning in the court room. I remonstrated with Irene in vain after you left the chamber. Opposition seems to render her more determined. I do not say that Mr. Campbell is not entitled to an apology. I have tendered him mine. But no man is entitled to an apology from a lady on her knees."

"Waal?" said Matt mildly. "What about it? An apology on her knees wouldn't kill her. In fact, it'd be a damned good chastenin' for her stubborn spirit. You can tell her she'll have to wear big hoops or she'll never make it, though."

"You—you can't mean that you would let a lady, and your own niece, go to her knees before a man?" gasped the young officer, aghast at the idea. "I shall kill this man before she can reach him, or I shall die in the attempt. I will brook no interference, sir, from you. I could never ask for her hand in marriage were I to fail her now. Mr. Campbell, arise and take your position, sir! For a lady's honor I demand the resumption of this duel."

The Hawk slowly raised himself to an erect position, but he did not comply with the lieutenant's demand. A great

light had been vouchsafed him. He now remembered his furious words to the young lady in the court room, words spoken in the heat of passion the literal meaning of which he had since forgotten.

All he could read in the riddle was that Metclaff was head over heels in love with Irene Claybourne and was ready to throw his life away to save her the slightest humiliation. Campbell could appreciate this emotion; he had so recently experienced it himself in the taking of the foul Ginter.

There was every reason to believe that Irene loved Metclaff if she loved any one. There was no reason for Campbell to have hoped for a closer acquaintanceship. It was well he had been snatched back from his fool's paradise.

"Lieutenant Metclaff is quite right," he affirmed aloud. From this moment there was a sense of impersonal detachment in the manner of the Hawk that was at once apparent to the observant Matt Woodruff.

"I had forgotten my rather dramatic words the morning of the inquest," went on Campbell. "Now that I understand the reason for your quarrel, Mr. Metclaff, I refuse to proceed with it. I must remove the cause for combat. I shall refuse to accept any sort of an apology from Miss Claybourne. Tangle! My writing desk."

"Now here," began Woodruff gruffly. "I—"

THE Hawk imperiously waved him to silence. He placed the little desk upon his knees. When he finished he held out the sheet to Metclaff as he sought for an envelope to address.

"This is a letter to Miss Claybourne," he said briefly. "Read it

aloud and see if it suitably fits the occasion and closes the matter between us."

Silently the lieutenant accepted the letter and read it aloud for the benefit of Matt Woodruff:

"MY DEAR MADEMOISELLE:

"In your note the other morning you mentioned that, in the event of my complete vindication of a certain unpardonable crime, I would be entitled to a sweeping apology for your possibly unkind thoughts. I have reason to believe that I am now fully exonerated of heinousness in your eyes, at least I trust so. You will kindly consider the matter at rest. To have served a lady is all the favor a gentleman could ask. If anything, accept my apology for my boorish action in the courthouse when I offered you a public insult.

"In case you may feel under a certain debt of gratitude for any service I may have rendered, you will please cease to do so. It was for the purpose solely of removing the stain upon my honor that I participated in the affair.

"As for your opinion of me as a duellist, I regret very much that we do not agree on the difference between a gentleman of honor and an assassin. As I am leaving Belle Point at once, I trust forever, kindly do not try to see me in order to offer any sort of humiliating apology. It would be revolting to me to see a lady upon her knees except in prayer.

"Your respectful servant,

"ALLAN MARION CAMPBELL."

Metclaff looked up, frowning.

"Sir," he said, "this is an elegant letter that covers all necessary points. However, it seems to me that the last paragraph is faintly insulting. It could have been left off entirely."

"It was appended to make certain that the lady will make no attempt to see me," replied Allan Campbell coldly.

"Mr. Campbell, I bid you good af-

ternoon. I also take the pleasure of thanking you for several niceties of chivalry which you have exhibited to me at various times and which it is entirely unnecessary to enumerate here."

"An' if you're satisfied now, you young fire-eater," snapped Uncle Matt bluntly, "after you deliver thet note, you git right back in bed an' stay there. You'll be down with pneumonia to-morrow!"

After the officer's departure, Woodruff contemplated the Hawk without breaking the silence. Then, as the sound of wheels announced the fact that Metclaff was on his way, the old man spoke gently.

"Did you really mean all thet you say in th' note, son?"

Campbell stared at him with inscrutable eyes.

"Certainly, sir," he answered steadily. "Have I led any one to believe otherwise?"

"Nope, nope," answered Matt hastily. "But you said you was leavin' town at once. You won't be outa bed for a week. Thet damned Metclaff was crazy to git you both up like this. This kind of chivalry be danged!"

"There is a boat going down the river to-morrow," announced the Hawk. "I shall be aboard if my negro has to carry me as a corpse."

Uncle Matt studied the younger man's face for a long moment without speaking. His greenish-gray eyes disconcerted the Hawk a trifle. Then he pressed Campbell's hand warmly and took his leave.

For five minutes after his departure Campbell stared sightlessly after him. His unseeing eyes did not register the return of Tangle-eye. Then the little writing desk crashed to the floor, scattering its contents over the carpet by

the bed in disorderly confusion, while the Hawk flung himself face downward across the coverlet.

CHAPTER XXII.

LIKE HER UNCLE MATTHEW.

IT was pretty late Sunday night when Matt Woodruff finally rode up to the stables on the Claybourne plantation, and the household were all abed.

The following morning Uncle Matt arose exceptionally early. To his great astonishment he found Metclaff and Irene before him eating an early breakfast in company. The old man glared at the fully dressed young officer whose right arm was now carried in a sling.

"What are you doin' outa bed again?"

"I am leaving for the fort on this morning's stage, sir." The lieutenant smiled a trifle bitterly. "I certainly appreciate your hospitality, but with Mrs. Claybourne ill, and my length of visit drawn to a close, I feel that I must go."

Woodruff looked keenly from one to the other of the two young people and wisely said no more. Uncle Eben shuffled in and took his order for breakfast.

"De carriage to take de lieutenant am waitin', missy," the aged negro announced.

Irene rose with Metclaff who had to hurry his farewells in order to make connections with the stage coach.

When Irene returned and seated herself at the corner of the table nearest Uncle Matt, he opened the conversation prosaically.

"You don't seem greatly excited at his departure," he commented.

"Neither do you," she countered.

"Gittin' used to departures," grunt-

ed Matt. "First one wounded idiot an' then the other. Allan is leavin' on the River Queen for Bonaparte this mornin'. Did Metclaff tell you how he got that message from Allan?"

"I think he related the circumstances," she answered diffidently. "I'd rather not discuss that matter, Uncle Matt."

"You don't have to," he snapped. "I'll do the discussing. You jes' listen. John Metclaff went to the Dixie House yestiddy to kill Allan, jes' to keep you from havin' to apologize. Crazy, but he means well. I got there jes' in time to stop the shootin'. The lieutenant loves you, gal. Did you know that?"

"He told me so after giving me that insulting mesage from—Allan Campbell," she faltered, his bluntness startling the truth out of her before she could refuse to answer.

"So?" Matt looked up, startled. "An' how did you feel about it?"

"Why, Uncle Matt! Is it nice to ask a maiden such a question as that?"

"You ain't no maiden, you're on the verge o' bein' an old maid. What did you tell him?"

The girl's eyes flamed, and she bit her lower lip angrily. "Why—why—"

"Why fiddlesticks!" snorted Woodruff. "You turned him down. That's why he left so suddenly this mornin'. Tell me what you're gonna do about Allan's note."

"Do?" She was patently surprised. "Why, I shall do nothing. The gentleman plainly outlined his position—and mine. He certainly has relieved me of a most embarrassing duty, as well as acted a cad by writing such an insulting letter."

"He's gonna relieve you of his presence before noon, too, if you don't git busy an' stop him. Pass the surrup."

"Why should I attempt to stop him?" she inquired coolly.

"If you want him, you'll have to do the stoppin'," rejoined Matt impatiently. "Thet's why. He's come clear o' ev'ry charge an' grudge you had against him except the charge o' bein' a duellist for profit. Waal, as soon as he learned why Metclaff was hossin' for a fight he refused to fight him. He sat down an' wrote thet note to you jes' because he thought you an' Metclaff had up a case. He gave you up without a struggle jes' to give Metclaff the chance to marry you. Yep, I said gave you up. For Allan Campbell loves you more'n anything in the world an' a damned sight more'n you deserve, my dear."

"Uncle Matthew!" she gasped. "I refuse to let you talk like that to me. Why—"

"Don't start any of thet 'Matthew' business on me. It sounds jes' like your mother," growled Woodruff angrily. "By thunder, they ain't no use play-actin' with me. You're head over heels in love with Allan an' you know it."

Irene's face had gone scarlet by now. "I have done nothing to send him away in such a hurry," she said, almost pleadingly. "How could I stop him, Uncle Matt?"

"How? By goin' to him right away an' tellin' him thet you're sorry about the whole damned mess an' thet you love him an' you won't let him go like thet."

"Sir? Uncle Matt, you are mad! I wouldn't do such a thing for any man in the world. Besides, it's not the truth. I don't love him! I don't love anybody but you and my mother. You are torturing me, Uncle Matt."

The old man arose and stood over

her. Gently he raised her in his arms and embraced her hungrily.

"Your uncle is an old fool who's sure been talkin' outa turn. I was certain you loved Allan Campbell. It takes an old bachelor to be a jackass ev'ry time. Forgive me, little gal, an' we'll jes' forget it. Waal, I must be moseyin' on to town—"

To his utter perplexity she clung tightly to him and burst into a renewed flood of tears.

"Oh, I do love him, Uncle Matt!" Irene whispered fiercely. "I've loved him with all my heart from the moment I first saw him. I've tried to steel my heart against him; it was all I could do when I thought he was the man who had killed daddy. And now that I know he is innocent—I can resist no longer. Oh, Uncle Matt, Uncle Matt, don't forsake me now. I shall die if Allan leaves me like this."

Woodruff was staggered at this sudden and overwhelming confession. Her fear that he was dropping the matter, to offer no further aid, had brought about her utter capitulation.

"Damned if women ain't the contraryest creatures I ever seen," he mumbled to himself in secret wonder. Aloud, he spoke gently in her ear as he stroked her head: "They ain't no shame for the love of a man to be in a gal's heart. Why should you want to fight it? You love Allan an' Allan loves you. You know both sides of it, but he don't. I've done told you exactly what to do, honey. You go straight to him as fast as you can git to town an'—"

"NEVER!" she cried. Her sorrow and yielding sweetness changed swiftly into anger. "I shall never go to him after such a message as he sent me. If he loves me as you

insist that he does, he won't leave Belle Point without trying to see me. He wouldn't let anything in the world separate us."

"You've asked me what to do, an' I'm tellin' you. Don't talk foolishness now. I'll take you to his rooms before I leave you to make peace. Now—"

"But, Uncle Matt," she protested in a horrified voice, "I can't do such a thing as that. Oh, I simply can't. What in the world would mother say? What would people think?"

This last change from anger to scandalized modesty which needed to be coaxed and urged before yielding was too much for the irascible nature of the old man.

"Damn the people!" he shouted angrily. "Damn convention! What do you care what the gossips say? Thet don't make you happy. You know better'n usin' thet kind o' tone on me—"

"Hush! Hush!" she cried in rosy confusion, placing her little hand across his angry mouth. "Aunt Columbine and all the darkies on the plantation will hear you."

As well try to stop a cloudburst!

"You listen to me," Uncle Matt roared louder than ever. "All your life your maw has folded her hands in resignation or flung 'em up in holy horror when you didn't act accordin' to her rules, sayin' you was this an' you was thet jes' because you was like your Uncle Matthew. I've stood for all thet slander an' blame for twenty-odd years without complainin'. If it's the truth, right here is the time, by thunder, to prove it. If you're like your Uncle Matt you'll throw what other folks says an' does into the cow-lot, an' go get what you want in spite o' hell an' high water. Waal, what you gonna do about it? It'll be boat time before you make up your mind. By thunder, are you

really like your Uncle Matt, or ain't you?"

Irene Claybourne drew herself erect and eyed her fiery and incorrigible old uncle squarely in the eye. She clenched her little fists, her full young bosom heaving adorably, her eyes flashing with fighting spirit.

"If I am disgraced for the rest of my life, I'll do it, Uncle Matt! Thank Heaven, I *am* like you, sir. Oh, hurry, hurry! We must not be too late."

Woodruff laughed a mighty laugh of sheer joy. The characteristics of a lifetime had been vindicated. Exultantly he swept his rebellious niece high in his arms.

"The spirit of the frontier," he shouted. "Thet's the kind of woman who helps to conquer new worlds. Eben! Eben! You old rascal, have the fastest span o' hosses in the stables hitched to the lightest buggy an' git it 'round to the front door in one minute. Eben! I say Eben!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT THE LANDING.

IN these epic fifties river traffic was an important artery of commerce.

As the pilot of the River Queen swung the broad bow of the craft toward the wharves, there was considerable bustle aboard the vessel and on the landing. In spite of all the confusion, and the exchange of several passengers of considerable distinction, the simple statement suffices that *he* was boarding the down-river boat. He stood out from the clustering group on the landing as a scarlet flamingo would stand out amid a flock of white egrets.

But Allan Campbell was not alone and unapproached as he had been that morning æons ago at the little town of

Bonaparte. He was the center of a little group of people who crowded forward to speak to him and shake his hand. It took the combined efforts of Laurence Stevens and Tangle-eye to keep the Hawk from being injured by the jostling, enthusiastic crowd.

Clad as before in a suit of rich black broadcloth that fitted his slim figure to perfection, with a rich black cloak flung over one shoulder against the October chill, Allan Campbell calmly awaited a dwindling of traffic before he thought of boarding the steamboat. All about him swirled the color of a prosperous town, but there was no response in his heart. His garb of black was most fitting for the somberness of his thoughts. He was going home, but, paradoxically, he was going into an exile of eternal loneliness.

The face of the man had mellowed subtly in the past few days. There were lines under his brooding eyes and about his mouth which did not come from physical pain. Sacrifice had stamped the finishing touch of approval to a finely drawn character.

At last the pilot of the boat jerked his whistle cord for one blast of warning. The white steam shot skyward as the echoes awoke to the hoarse blast of the whistle. And then Campbell made a brief sign to his huge black slave. Tangle-eye stooped and lifted the large horse-hair trunk and started for the gangplank.

Stevens drew Campbell to one side to bid him a last farewell. They clasped hands warmly as the pilot sounded his last warning. Campbell turned to make his way to the gangplank when the sound of madly galloping horses broke upon them. Without turning his head Campbell stalked on, the crowd parting respectfully to permit his passage.

And then the most treasured voice in

all the world broke on his ears and halted him as though he had been turned to stone.

"Allan! Allan! Oh, dear, wait!"

His face gone white with the secret belief that his mind had given way, Campbell swayed slightly and then turned himself about. Rushing toward him across the wharf oblivious of the obstacles in her path, her slender little feet scarcely seeming to touch the ground, came the woman who had conquered and claimed his proud heart.

Like a homing pigeon she darted straight to him and flung her arms about his neck, unabashed by the presence of hundreds of spectators. She clung to him, sobbing hysterically.

"Oh, my darling," she murmured, unaware that she was exerting a painful pressure upon one of his bullet wounds. "Oh, I care not what you think—what any one in the world thinks. I could not let you go. You must not leave me! You must not leave me!"

As unaware as she of the pain in his wounded throat, Allan slowly folded his arms about her as he gazed into her tear-dimmed eyes. His heart was throbbing violently in emotion which was far beyond his control. His voice was husky, almost unintelligible, as he spoke.

"Irene! Irene!" he muttered unbelievably. "You have come to me like this? What have I made you do? But I did not know! I did not know!"

"Oh, I know you didn't," she wept happily.

BEFORE she could prevent him he was kneeling at her feet and kissing the hem of her skirt, his manner of publicly placing her on a pedestal far above him. She bent over him quickly, urging him to his feet.

"If I may not kneel, neither shall you," she murmured. "Thank God I was in time."

Allan remained on his knees for a moment longer.

"Mademoiselle," he said distinctly, so that the hushed and awed spectators heard every word, "I have the honor of asking for your hand."

"Sir," she answered whimsically through her tears, "you may have it, for of what use is a hand without a heart?"

Now he arose and folded her in his arms. His cape slid unnoticed from his shoulders, his creamy, spotless beaver dropped neglected to the wharf. Once again she lay against his beating heart while the entire universe stood still.

All activity on the landing and on the boat was suspended in the sheer beauty

of this romance. The pilot forgot his whistle, the roustabouts forgot their cotton bales, the passengers forgot their interests, the spectators forgot all petty thoughts as all gazed almost in reverence on the little tableau.

A grinning and now thoroughly happy Tangle-eye padded noiselessly back down the gangplank with the heavy trunk. He made his way proudly to the side of the unnoticed Matt Woodruff, who was standing at the rear of the wharf.

"Quality folks, Marse Matt," proclaimed the negro. "Yassuh, quality folks. Did Ah evah tell yo' 'bout de Mississippi Campbells?"

But to Allan and Irene all other life had ceased for the moment to exist. Slowly his lips met hers in their first kiss.

THE END.



Madstones

ALTHOUGH scorned by doctors as a "folklore remedy," a little almond-shaped pebble owned by a Virginia family is credited with the cure of hundreds of snake and mad dog bites, as well as cases of blood poisoning. It is a "madstone" obtained from natives of the East Indies, and brought to this country in the eighteenth century.

The stone is applied directly to the wound, to which it adheres until saturated with poison, when it drops off. After being soaked in water, it is again applied. If the poison has all been extracted, it is said, the stone will not adhere to the wound.

Belief in the efficacy of the madstone is of great antiquity. Writers of the thirteenth century attribute to the gallstone of an ox the power of extracting the poison of venomous animals. An exhibit of madstones in the Smithsonian Institution includes seeds, balls of matted hair, and pebbles of carbonate of lime. These have been selected from the magic medicines of as widely separated races as the South Sea Islanders and the North American Indians, proving the use of this supposed remedy to be widespread among primitive peoples.

Dorothy Davidson.

HERE COMES THE FLEET!

When the Fleet's in, the Navy must be served—but that's not saying what sort of dish the Canal Zone's Army defenders may concoct for the gobs!

By **LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER**

"**H**ERE comes the fleet!"

The shout was raised and carried along by a dozen voices, and finally penetrated the gun pit, where little Private Amos Dougherty was industriously polishing a bit of brass on one of the big guns that protect the Pacific entrance to the Panama Canal.

The hand which an instant before had been rubbing so cheerfully and contentedly, halted, and began shaking as though its owner had suddenly become possessed with the palsy. A juicy and generous chew of fine cut slipped down an unsuspecting throat.

"Eeee-ah! Eeee-aaah!" choked and wheezed Amos.

Private Gus Westover, who had been painting the gun carriage, rushed over and belabored the strangling soldier between his narrow shoulder blades until the capricious cud came flying out like a miniature brown cannon ball.

"Feel sick?" grinned the sandy-haired Westover.

Amos's illness went deeper than the flesh. He was sick, sick unto his soul. His narrow face, turned toward the anchorage at the entrance of the canal, was deathly white. Already anchor chains were being freed on the ships of the Pacific Fleet.

"The fleet's in," Amos's pale lips mumbled.

"And how!" chortled the light-hearted Gus. "Boy, there'll be a big time in old Panama to-night! 'Bout a million gobs with a month's pay in their jeans. Plenty business for Cocoa Grove and the *cantinas*."

"Oh. O-o-oh," groaned Amos pitifully.

"Feel sick as that?" demanded Gus suspiciously. "Just from a little tobacco—" Then, seeing that Amos's illness was not of a disordered stomach, but of a troubled mind, he began to wonder why. What had the fleet to do with—

Understanding dawned in his brain. Memories of the last time the fleet was in—gossip about Amos; a husky sailor of the fleet with a very jealous disposition; and Mamie—extremely blond and, as Gus would be the last to deny, extremely pleasing to the eye.

"Oh-ho!" laughed Gus gleefully and unfeelingly. "The fleet's in, eh, Amos? And Mamie's gob boy-friend is back. And what he won't do to a soldier by the name of Amos Dougherty for beating his time with little Mamie! Oh, boy!" Gus smacked his lips audibly.

"Oh! Oh!" groaned the narrow-chested Amos.

The abject wretchedness of his brother-in-arms disgusted Gus.

"Ah, buck up, doughboy!" he sneered. "Beat hell out of him if he

makes a howl about Mamie. Before I'd let a lousy gob take a skirt away from me—"

Amos interrupted. "He only weighs two hundred and eighty. And last year he was heavyweight champ of the fleet. And he says to me specially, the night before the fleet pulled out, 'Dougherty,' he says, 'if I hear that you been hanging around my girl, I'll beat hell out of you when I get back.' He meant it, too." Amos shivered.

"Hm!" commented Gus sympathetically. He seemed to be thinking hard about Amos's predicament. "I didn't know it was that serious. Heavyweight champ, eh? Weighs two hundred and eighty. Boy!" He glanced sidewise at the puny Amos, and then at his own biceps.

For awhile, there was a discreet silence between the two soldiers in blue denim. Amos stared mournfully, and Gus gazed pensively at the great fleet now calmly riding at anchor in the lee of Taboga.

Suddenly Gus, who had quite a reputation for being a quick-witted lad, struck a solid fist against a palm. Amos, who had just been dolefully imagining such snacks, jumped all of two feet into the air.

"I've got it!" cried Gus. "Oh, boy!"

"What?" asked Amos sadly.

PANAMA CITY seemed buried in a blizzard of white. Shore leave for the fleet. Every narrow, dirty street, every bar, every blaring cabaret was jammed with sailors in white. There were thousands of them, drinking, dancing, fighting, loving. Here and there, the green of a lone soldier's uniform stood out like a leaf on unbleached cotton.

It was about midnight, in the bar of the Gold Dollar, when Hank Mitzen-

berger, hairy-chested, heavy-jowled, heavyweight champ of the fleet, caught up with the quaking, diminutive Amos Dougherty. It was not one of Hank's traits to beat about the bush. Although he had never heard of mathematics, he believed that a straight arm was the shortest distance between nose and fist.

"Here y'are, ya little mutt!" was his greeting. "What's dis I hear 'bout yuh two-timin' me wit' me goil?"

"Honest, I haven't, Hank!" whimpered Amos, cringing. "It's a mistake. It's another fellow that's been rushing her. No kidding, Hank. I've seen Mamie once, or maybe twice, but I was only trying to do you a favor. I tried to tell her what a mistake she'd make if she gave you the gate for this other guy. But she wouldn't listen to me. Honest, Hank. It's the truth."

"Yah!" snarled Hank disbelievingly, and drew back a hairy, ham-size fist.

"Don't!" screamed Amos, the perspiration rolling down his face. "Wait, Hank! I can prove it. She's inside with the other guy now."

Hank was thick-witted, but seeing was believing.

"Where?" he growled, dropping his fist, much to Amos's relief. "Show me dis bozo. I'll beat his doity nut off."

Amos willingly lead the way to the door connecting the bar with the cabaret. Just as he was about to enter out stepped the blond, plump Mamie herself. Behind her was a tall, sandy-haired soldier.

With a mighty rumble of rage Hank hurled himself toward the usurper of his delectable property. Then a most surprising thing happened.

"Tut, tut, my man!" came lightly from Mamie's sandy-haired escort. "Stand aside, please, and let the lady

by." And, indignity of indignities, he tapped Hank lightly upon the shoulder with a dainty swagger stick!

Dazed, Hank took in the Sam Browne belt and the gold bars of an Army officer. At last, reluctantly, he pulled at his forelock, and mumbled, "Aye, aye, sir!"—and let them pass. Rank could not be denied, and well Hank knew it.

THE fleet was gone. One hour of reckoning had been successfully averted. Another, of different kind, was at hand.

Together they sat at one of those small tables in the Gold Dollar; the mincing Mannie smirking over some

secret joke; Amos no longer quaking and the erstwhile pseudo lieutenant, obliging Gus Westover.

"Well, I guess you got something else to do now," said Amos pointedly to the amiable Gus. "Two's company."

"Boy! You said it!" returned Gus happily. "Got that twenty bucks you promised me for this little—ah—job? You have! That's great! I got to pay ten of it to the tailor that let me borrow a looey's uniform. Twenty bucks, that's right, Amos, old kid. Come on, Mamie, let's go! I know where there's a preacher who'll marry us right this minute. Oh, boy!"

"Oh, O-o-oh!" groaned Amos, very, very sick unto his soul.

THE END.

Filipino Gamecocks

WHAT the bull-fight is to Spain, the cock-fight is to the Philippines. The gamecock is found everywhere, tied by the leg to boxes, bales and barrels on the wharves, outside warehouses, in the streets, or beside the squalid nipa huts beyond the city. As you stroll along, at any time of day, you are sure to meet more than one native with an aggressive little head poked out of the front of his shirt, and if you hire a handy man or even a "knife-boy" he will bring his game chicken with him.

This care is not prompted by affection, but because the bird represents an investment certain to prove both pleasurable and profitable. If a man owns no roof but his ragged straw hat, he will still be the proud possessor of a gamecock. These feathered gladiators are scraggy, noisy, furtive-eyed little fellows, lean and hungry, but always full of fight.

When two men meet, each carrying a gamecock, a pit is made in the dirt and a crowd of spectators quickly forms a ring around it. The betting runs high, unhampered by the need of actual coin. Household goods, clothes and trinkets are wagered, and young girls sacrifice rings, brooches, bangles and even their rosaries on their favorite bird. It is not unusual for a woman to put up her slippers, and go home barefooted when she loses.

A bird rarely survives more than one encounter for the reason that small, slender knives sharpened to razor-edge are affixed to the legs just above the spurs, and when the contestants are thrown at each other, the victor is often transfixd by the little daggers on the other's legs before they touch the ground. The encounter is always brief, and invariably fatal to one; when both are killed, the last to die is the victor.

Minna Irving.

The Men Who Make The Argosy



H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Cyrano," "The Seal of Solomon,"
"John Solomon, Supercargo," etc.

H. BEDFORD-JONES is a Canadian by birth, but not by profession, having removed to the United States at the age of one year. For over twenty years he has been more or less profitably engaged in writing and traveling. As he has seldom resided in one place longer than a year or so and is a person of retiring habits, he is somewhat a man of mystery; more than once he has suffered from unscrupulous gentlemen who impersonated him—one of whom murdered a wife and was subsequently shot by the police, luckily after losing his alias.

The real Bedford-Jones is an elderly man, whose gray hair and precise attire give him rather the appearance of a retired foreign diplomat. His hobby is stamp collecting, and his collection of Japan is said to be one of the finest in existence. At present writing he is en route to Morocco, and when this appears in print he will probably be somewhere on the Mojave Desert in company with Erle Stanley Gardner.

Questioned as to the main facts in his life, he declared there was only one main fact, but it was not for publication; that his life had been uneventful except for numerous financial losses, and that his only adventures lay in evading adventurers. In his younger years he was something of an athlete, but the encroachments of age preclude any active pursuits except that of motoring. He is usually to be found poring over his stamps, working at his



typewriter, or laboring in his California rose garden, which is one of the sights of Cathedral Cañon, near Palm Springs.

Bedford-Jones has written stories laid in many corners of the earth, but among his most popular tales were the *John Solomon* stories which started many years ago in the ARGOSY. After an absence of ten years, *John Solomon* is to stage a come-back and in the near future will reappear in ARGOSY.

Of late years Bedford-Jones has distinguished himself with the Dumas type of story—the romantic adventure tale of the days of Louis XIII of France. "Cyrano," which begins in this issue, is the latest novel of this type.



Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint



"THE RADIO FLYERS" START OFF TO COMMANDER BYRD

RALPH MILNE FARLEY'S serial novel, "The Radio Flyers," met a great reception from ARGOSY readers and called forth many unusual and interesting responses. It has traveled to many corners of the world, but is now en route to that portion of the globe which the author claims does not exist—the South Pole.

Mrs. Richard E. Byrd, wife of the commander, thought so highly of the story that she forwarded copies of it to the Byrd Expedition. In her letter to the author, she writes:

I have sent your story, "The Radio Flyers," off to Commander Byrd so that it will surely go down on the first ship. I am afraid, though, it will not reach him until February, or about that time.

MARIE A. BYRD.

By the time "The Radio Flyers" reaches Commander Byrd, ARGOSY readers will again have penetrated inside the earth with Ralph Milne Farley in "The Radio Gun-Runners," a sequel to the former novel, which we will publish around the end of February.

APOLOGIES TO FRED MacISAAC

SOMETIME ago, in answering the query of one of our readers, we expressed the belief that Fred MacIsaac has had no books published. Which was all wrong. Mr. MacIsaac puts us right, as follows:

My war novel, "Tin Hats," published by Chelsea House, was very successful; so much

so, that a film was named after it, and now comes a musical comedy bearing the same name.

Waterson, of New York, published "Hole in the Wall," an ARGOSY serial, and also "Vanishing Professor," another ARGOSY yarn. Hurst and Beckett, of London, published "Hole in the Wall" in England, changing the title to "Yellow Shop."

Sorry—and we'll do better next time.

WHO HAS THESE?

MANY readers have been asking for back issues of ARGOSY containing "The Ship of Ishtar." Our stock of these back issues is exhausted, so we can no longer supply them. Perhaps some reader can help out this lady:

New York, N. Y.

I was very much disappointed to hear you are unable to supply me with the back numbers of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY, i. e., November 8 to December 13, 1924.

Do you think it would do any good to appeal in Argonotes? I hope that you may be able to help me in my almost hopeless search for that illusive story, "The Ship of Ishtar."

MRS. THOS. F. GAFFNEY,
410 East 101st St., Apt. 31,
New York City.

GOLD

GEORGE PARKE'S little article on gold in Nicaragua has aroused quite a bit of curiosity—especially among marines stationed in that country. Here is one who is skeptical:

San Albino, Nicaragua.

In the ARGOSY of June 22, 1929, there appears an article headed "Thar's Gold in Them Thar Hills"; this was supposedly written by a marine, one George Parke. It is the conception of the writer that this Parke is or was under some great mental strain, no doubt caused by missing too many transports and becoming in our lingo "tropical."

We read this article, for we have been stationed in San Albino, Nicaragua, the past six or seven months where one of Nicaragua's largest gold mines is located, although now dormant and has been for the past two years. We have never known of any marine who has secured any gold from it or any of the other mines in Nicaragua, except possibly, a small stone the size of a pea, which may or may not contain an atom of gold; if that will keep one in wealth for the rest of his life we would like to know where Parke lives, or tell us where we can reside in such comfort.

Personally the only gold I have seen was in a set of false teeth.

I am writing this in the hope that you will print it and thereby avert a gold rush of any of your readers who may have believed Parke's article.

Far be it from me to call Mr. Parke a prevaricator, but if he is, or was a marine, why not give his buddies a chance to get on the inside of this gold rush? Come out, Parke; tell us "whar that thar gold am at."

Sgt. R. W. GLADDEN.

And Mr. Parke answers:

Replying to your letter in the order of its composition, I will first say that I am not a marine, and never came into contact with them as a body, except at sea, when making trips of adventure on U. S. vessels. I, however, served in the Spanish War and also put in a little time as a "filibusterer" in Honduras. I have also been in some of the ports of Nicaragua.

Probably you are not aware of the fact that writers of brief articles called "fillers" are a busy class of persons, particularly as they have to be very sure of their facts ere they submit them to the magazines. In gathering these facts we do not depend on the encyclopedias or on hearsay evidence, but get them either direct or from reliable persons who have been in the localities mentioned, or experienced the happening personally. Such was the case when I wrote the article regarding gold in Nicaragua. I had the facts from a lieutenant of marines who wrote long and interesting letters to his brother in the town where I then lived. The brother had also been in the service in the World War, and was not a person to believe fairy tales. Hence, the lieutenant was careful to state facts, which I verified by personal recollection and inquiries among the travelers and fruit men of New Orleans. I will mail your letter to the lieutenant, who is some distance from your station, and he can use discretion in communicating with you.

You warn me in one paragraph against a "gold rush," and in the next one ask me to assist you in organizing one for the marines. I will not give out the location of this place, as it is none of my business and will harm others, as I am aware of the strictness of military regulations. But it is up to the lieutenant himself to do as he pleases. He has been in that section longer than you say you have, and is a close observer, being in entire command of a district, both native and marine.

Referring to the gold mines at your place, which have probably been opened since the Spanish régime, I will state that official records say that there are several in the northern portion of Nicaragua as well as in the East, most of them operated by British interests, intermittently. These mines are similar to those all along the Rockies, of which the ranges in the Central American states are a part. All are operated with machines and are in the rock itself. The gold that is recovered by the casual prospector is washed out of the streams and is in the form of nuggets, not in rock, but of almost virgin purity. Probably you have never "panned" for gold, but if you inquire you will get full details from some old timer. There is a saying, "Gold is where you find it," and it is literally true. It has been found in the most unaccountable places.

I believe this will allay your scruples as to the truth of my story, but I am sorry not to appease your curiosity.

Geo. Parke.

"THE PLANET OF PERIL," leads off this week:

Chicago, Ill.

Just a line to tell you that I enjoyed Otis Adelbert Kline's story, "The Planet of Peril," very much.

I am one of the many, I believe, who enjoy that type of story, and look forward to again seeing Mr. Kline in your magazine. He has a very good imagination, plus a knowledge of science, that makes his story very interesting.

C. J. NIELSEN.

NEXT comes W. Wirt:

Chicago, Ill.

W. Wirt is, I think, one of your best writers, and I anticipate more of his entertaining stories.

I have been an ARGOSY reader for about four years and expect to be as long as the ARGOSY is printed.

GEORGE J. KALEBICH.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this
issue of the magazine are as fol-
lows:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

I did not like _____

because _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____

11-16

AND now a batch of favorite stories:

Fort Worth, Texas.

Maybe I am easily pleased, but I like practically all the stories in the ARGOSY. Perhaps the ones that appeal to me least are the stories of the North Sea and the Vikings, but I read them just the same.

Of course, I have my favorite authors. I especially like Hulbert Footner, Fred Mac-Isaac, George F. Worts, Lieut. John Hopper, Ray Cummings, W. Wirt, Garret Smith and many of the others.

I thought "The Planet of Peril" was a fine story, also "The Haunted Yacht Club," "Monkey Eyes," "Yellow Ivory," "Gray Eyes of Peril," "Arabian Nights of 1929"; all the *Mme. Storey* tales, the *Bill and I* stories and the stories of *Gillian Hazeltine*. I think the serial line-up at present is the best ever. "The Princess of the Atom" and "The Mental Marvel" are especially interesting.

In fact, there are so many stories that I like that it would take up all the space in the Argonotes to print them.

I have read the ARGOSY a long time, and like it best of all the magazines I read. I don't see how it could be made better. It suits me perfectly as it is.

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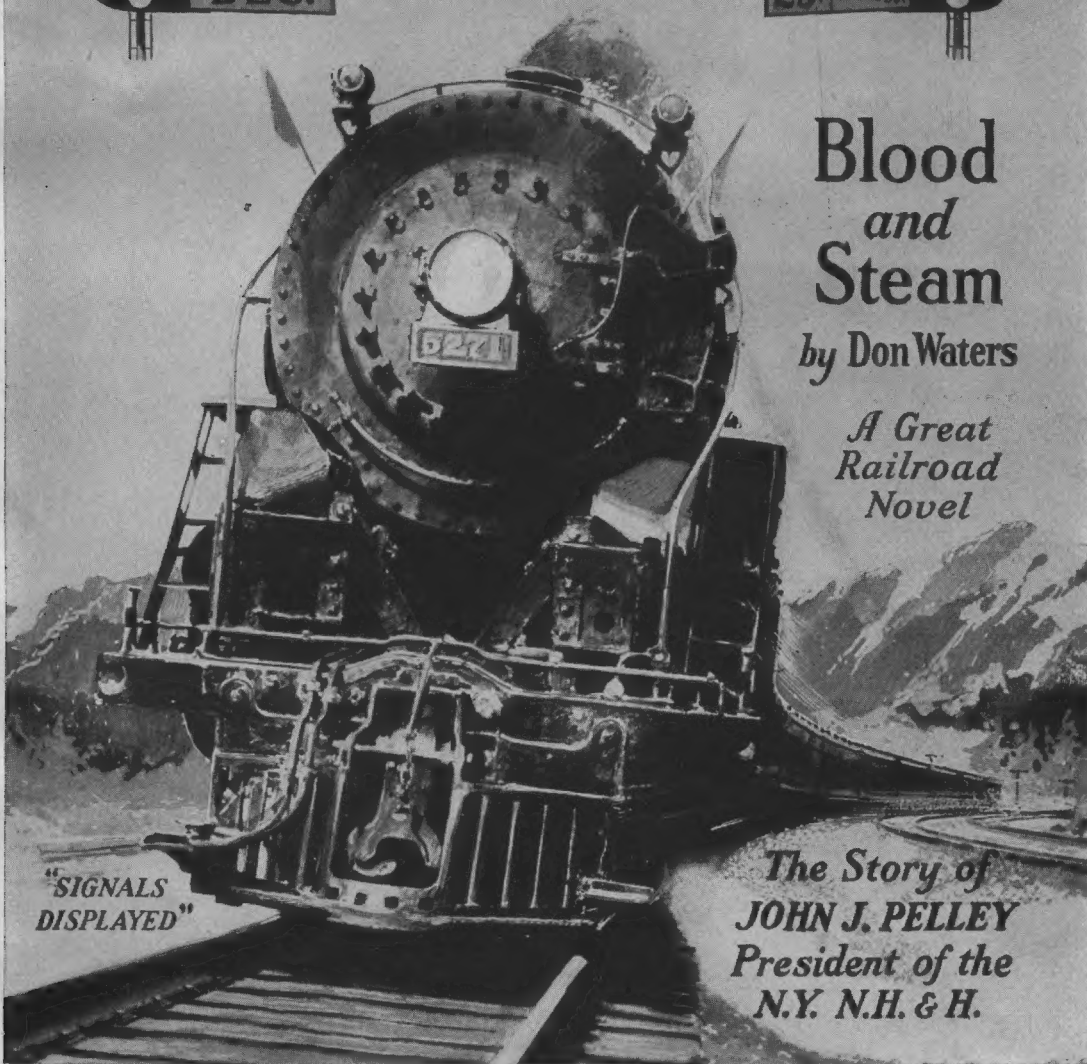
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